



**INTERNATIONAL  
SOLIDARITY  
WITH THE SPANISH  
REPUBLIC**

**1936-1939**



ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE USSR

THE INSTITUTE  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

SOVIET WAR VETERANS' COMMITTEE

# **INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WITH THE SPANISH REPUBLIC**

**1936-1939**



Progress Publishers  
Moscow



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СОЛИДАРНОСТЬ НАРОДОВ С ИСПАНСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКОЙ  
1936—1939

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## FROM THE PUBLISHERS

The idea of publishing a book about the international solidarity with the Spanish people in the thirties was advanced in July 1966 at the Berlin international meeting of veterans of the Spanish national-revolutionary war and former international brigaders. An International Editorial Board was set up for the purpose. At its meeting in Moscow on January 10 through 19, 1970, the Board discussed and approved for publication the materials presented by a number of national organisations of Spanish war veterans.

Naturally, the collection could not contain material on all the national contingents that took part in the struggle in Spain. Nevertheless, the contribution made by anti-fascists from the countries listed in the book was decisive both for the movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic and for the organisation of International Brigades.

The International Editorial Board was greatly helped in its work by Dolores Ibarruri and other editors of the monumental study *The War and Revolution in Spain 1936-1939*; by International Brigade veterans Franz Dahlem (GDR), Franciszek Ksieżarczyk (Poland), Karlo Lukanov (Bulgaria), and Valter Roman (Rumania).

The articles on the solidarity movement with Republican Spain were prepared by the following organisations of veterans of the movement and of the anti-fascist war of the Spanish people in 1936-1939 (the authors' names are given in brackets):

A group of Argentinian volunteers in the Spanish People's Army (*a group of authors*);

The Association of Austrian Volunteers for Republican Spain in 1936-1939 and Friends of Democratic Spain (*Max Stern*);

The International Brigade Association and Friends of Republican Spain, Britain (*Nan Green*);

The Anti-Fascist Fighters' Committee, Bulgaria (*D. Sirkov*);

Veterans of the International Brigades—Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of Canada (*a group of authors*);



A group of Cuban fighters in the Spanish Republican Army (*Ladislao G. Carbajal, Ramon Nicolau*);

The Union of Fighters Against Fascism, Czechoslovakia (*Prof. František Kruzík*);

A group of Finnish international brigaders (*Paavo Koskinen, Onni Hukkinen*);

The Fraternity of Former Spanish Volunteers, France (*Roger Michaut*);

The section of former fighters in Spain, the Anti-Fascist Fighters' Committee in the GDR (*Prof. Hans Teubner*);

The Union of Hungarian Guerrillas (*Jenő Györkei*);

A group of Irish veterans of International Brigades (*Michael O'Riordan*);

The Italian Association of Anti-Fascist Volunteers in Spain (*Cesare Colombo*);

A group of Norwegian veterans of International Brigades (*Randulf Dalland, J. Lappe, S. Mortensen, E. Reiersen*);

The Central Commission of the Veterans of the Dabrowski Brigade under the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, Poland (*a group of authors*);

The Anti-Fascist Fighters' Committee in the Rumanian Socialist Republic (*Mihai Burcă, Valter Roman*);

The Union of Swedish Volunteers in Spain (*Knut Olsson, Sixten Rogeby*);

The Fraternity of Former Swiss Fighters in Republican Spain (*a group of authors*);

Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, USA (*Arthur H. Landis*);

The section of participants in the national-revolutionary war in Spain, the Soviet War Veterans' Committee (*Prof. D. Pritsker*);

The Fraternity of Former Yugoslav Volunteers in the Spanish Republican Army (*a group of authors*).

The article "The Fight Goes On" is written by Chairman of the Communist Party of Spain *Dolores Ibarruri*; the article "An Important Stage in the Peoples' Struggle Against Fascism", by former Commissar General of the International Brigades *Luigi Longo*, now Chairman of the Italian Communist Party; the article "The War in Spain and the Struggle of the International Communist Movement for Unity of the Anti-Fascist Forces", by the veteran of the International Brigades, *Franz Dahlem* (GDR), now member of the CC SUPG; the concluding article was prepared, on instructions from the International Editorial Board, by the Soviet Editorial Board (*I. S. Kremer and I. N. Nesterenko*).

## DOLORES IBARRURI

Chairman of the Communist Party of Spain

### THE FIGHT GOES ON

The resistance of the people of Spain to the military-fascist revolt that began in June 1936 holds a special place among the political events that shook the consciousness of Europe and the world in the thirties.

In a period when the so-called democratic governments were conceding position after position to fascism and thus helping it to gain ground, this powerful and unexpected resistance immediately won the sympathies of the most progressive forces in all countries, and particularly those of the working class, who declared their support for the Spanish people in no uncertain terms.

A counterweight to this attitude of the popular and democratic forces was the open hostility to the struggle of the Spanish people on the part of the governments of France and Britain, which from the outset tried to stifle it with the help of the so-called policy of non-intervention, which in effect meant aiding and abetting the aggressor.

This policy prevented the Spanish Government from purchasing the arms so badly needed for defence against the counter-revolutionary revolt, that had its origins in Mussolini's Italy and in Hitler Germany, which were then preparing to launch acts of aggression in Europe.

The force opposing the policy of cowardly tolerance of and concessions to fascist aggression adopted by the "democratic" governments (a policy that was very soon to turn against those who conducted it—openly or shamefacedly) was the Soviet Union. Then the only socialist state, despite its geographical remoteness from the scene of events, which made it almost impossible physically to come to the aid of the Spanish people, it declared from the very first hour of the struggle that the cause of the Spanish Republic was that of all progressive and forward-looking mankind.

The Soviet Union consistently proved in practice that its declaration was not a mere propagandist phrase, that it reflected an unswerving determination to help the Spanish people and government in their desperate resistance to fascist aggression. And this despite the fact that between Spain and the Soviet Union at that time there had not even been any diplomatic relations.



The fascist putsch left the Republic without means of defence. Popular resistance seemed impossible without aircraft, without tanks, without guns, without all the things that could have been used against the insurgent forces, which Italy and Germany were supplying with every kind of offensive and defensive weapon.

The Soviet Union provided the Republican Government with military equipment to fight the revolt. But it was no easy task to deliver it both because of the distance between Spain and the USSR and because of the policy conducted by the governments of France, Britain and the U.S.A.

How many Soviet ships were attacked and sunk on the way to Spain! How many Soviet people filled with a heroic resolve to help the Spanish people defend their right to a life of freedom in a democratic Spain sacrificed their own lives in this cause!

How many aircraft, how many engines remained on French territory, held up by the Blum government at a time when our soldiers were crying out for arms with which to defend themselves! A considerable quantity of these arms never arrived in Spain and was subsequently used by the Germans against the French people themselves. Nothing can wash away the historical guilt of those who devised the policy of "non-intervention"!

Appealing to the internationalist consciousness of the Communists, of the whole international working-class movement, of all progressively-minded people, the Communist International in every country mobilised for aid to the Spanish people the most capable fighting elements and organised the International Brigades. In the trenches of Republican Spain the soldiers of these brigades won eternal glory. Defending the Spanish people and the freedom of their own countries, they raised the banner of proletarian internationalism to the highest peaks of heroism and self-sacrifice.

The Communist International, realising that all peoples of the world had a stake in the struggle of the Spanish people, called upon all working people, all progressive forces to come to the aid of Republican Spain in its resistance to fascist aggression.

Italians and Germans, French and Poles, Britishers and North Americans, Rumanians, Bulgarians and Yugoslavs, Austrians and Swiss, Finns and Swedes, Irish, Norwegians and Albanians, Canadians, Cubans, Argentinians, Mexicans and representatives of other Latin American republics, people of all continents, arrived in Spain to fight alongside the Spanish people in the first great battle against fascist aggression, a battle that became the prologue to the Second World War. There may not have been so many of them, but all the same their participation was of immense importance because of their heroism, selflessness and spirit of self-sacrifice. The contribution of the internationalists was of invaluable assistance to us and inscribed the finest page in the history of international solidarity.

With the deepest emotion one reads this book and feels how alive and strong, despite the passage of time, is the memory of Republican Spain, the first country to face armed fascist aggression.

Along with the fighters of the International Brigades Soviet air-men and tank crews arrived in Spain as fighting men and instructors for our soldiers, who did not yet know how to use modern weapons. Together they fought heroically and died gloriously, showing the full significance of proletarian internationalism, how much it meant that there was such a country as the Soviet Union, the first socialist country in the world.

Although the armed struggle ended with the defeat of the Republic because of the inequality of forces and the betrayal by the Madrid Junta led by Colonel Casado, the struggle for the Republic and democracy did not end with the establishment of the Franco dictatorship. It has heroically continued in the most difficult conditions of a terrorist regime, and it continues to this day, inspired above all by the working class and its Communist Party.

This struggle which is being fought by the workers, peasants and students of universities and institutes in Spain, by the intelligentsia, professional people, and the basic political groups of our country, excluding of course the most reactionary section of the big bourgeoisie and the still surviving groups of the fascism of yesterday, this struggle has brought about the crisis that the dictatorship is experiencing today. The further development of this crisis will undoubtedly condemn Francoism to extinction and lead to the establishment of a democratic system in Spain.

The most interesting thing about this struggle is that, just as in the years between 1936 and 1939, it is being waged mainly by the young generation, not only Communists but also other democratically-minded contingents of youth. The young people are continuing the tradition, the glorious and heroic tradition which takes its source from our fighters of 1936 to 1939 and their fraternal unity with the comrades of the International Brigades. This tradition lives on consistently and vigorously. Youth today fights with the revolutionary conviction that only by struggle can they put an end to dictatorship and open up for Spain the path to democracy and socialism.

Today this struggle is supported by all the main democratic forces of our country, including many people and groups that only yesterday were supporting Franco. This struggle is shaking the fascist structure of the regime and creating conditions for the establishment of a democratic system in which the working class and democratic forces will play a role that determines the political and social structure of Spain—a Spain open to all that is progressive, whose goal is socialism, and socialism only, a goal towards which all of today's main political forces who are aware of the historical realities of our epoch are striving.



LUIGI LONGO

*Chairman of the Italian Communist Party*

## AN IMPORTANT STAGE IN THE PEOPLES' STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM

The pages of this book recall the great urge for solidarity that arose when the working people and democrats of all countries hastened to the assistance of Republican Spain, which had been attacked by the combined forces of the insurgent generals, German nazism and Italian fascism.

The news of the Franco revolt roused great anxiety throughout Europe and the world. Massive popular demonstrations of solidarity took place in London, Moscow, Stockholm, Paris, New York, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and many other capitals. Everywhere people expressed a determination to render real assistance to the Spanish Republic, the victim of attack. Food and medical supplies were hastily collected and sent to Spain; field hospitals were organised. Volunteers from various countries tried every means of getting to the Franco-Spanish frontier in the Pyrenees or of reaching Spain by sea from the ports of Southern France. Foreign anti-fascists living in Spain or those who had arrived at Barcelona to take part in the People's Olympiad<sup>1</sup> volunteered for the ranks of the first people's detachments that fought against the military-fascist conspirators.

After the emotional upsurge of the first days came the question of how to find organisational forms for rendering material assistance and participation by the volunteers. This problem assumed special importance in France, partly because in France there were many groups of emigres who had left their homeland for economic or political reasons (heavy unemployment or savage reaction and fascist regimes) and who were now eager to help Republican Spain. The French working people and democrats—under the influence of the Popular Front—took an active part in the na-

tional and international struggle for peace and freedom. France was then almost the only gateway into Spain, but this gateway was by no means easy to reach or to pass through. This was the France of the Popular Front, but it was also the France of Léon Blum, and neither material aid nor the volunteers themselves could freely enter neighbouring Spain.

This is confirmed by the massive evidence collected in this book concerning the difficulties that the anti-fascist volunteers from many countries encountered and had to overcome to defeat the vigilance of the police when crossing the frontier.

As is known, the capitalist states of Europe conducted a policy of what they called non-intervention. But this "non-intervention" was one-sided. Despite Franco-Spanish agreements, the French government considered it its duty to prevent the flow of aid to Spain. At the same time the fascist government of Italy and the nazis met no obstacles in sending arms and troops to the assistance of the rebel generals.

With the permission of the so-called democratic governments, and sometimes without it, Aid Spain centres were set up in various countries. In order to stimulate and co-ordinate the activities of these centres the first European Conference in Defence of the Spanish Republic assembled in Paris in August 1936. It set up the International Co-operation and Information Committee for Aid to the Spanish Republic.

Communists, Socialists, Social-Democrats, the League of Human Rights and various movements in the Protestant Church, people of the Anglican Church, world-famous representatives of the Catholic religion and numerous public figures in science and culture actively joined in organising aid for Republican Spain.

It can be justly asserted, as was stated authoritatively by Stalin at the time, that the Spanish cause had become the cause of all advanced and progressive mankind.

The working people of Spain answered the revolt of the generals and the treachery of whole sectors of the traditional state machine by taking upon themselves the task of saving the democratic freedoms of their country. The struggle in defence of the Republic assumed above all a deeply national character. It was the people who initially offered resistance to the rebel generals.

The war in Spain was a conflict between the alliance of reactionary forces and the bloc of popular forces that had taken shape in the struggle against the regime of the so-called "Black Two Years".<sup>1</sup> This clash made still more urgent the necessity for providing the republican state with a democratic and socially advanced substance.

<sup>1</sup> From the autumn of 1933 to late 1935, when the country was ruled by the bloc of reactionary and pro-fascist parties and groups that had won the elections to the Cortes.—*Ed.*

<sup>1</sup> The People's Olympiad, to be opened on July 22, 1936 in Barcelona, was sponsored by proletarian and democratic sports organisations of a number of countries.—*Ed.*





Soviet volunteer airmen at Karl Marx's grave. London, 1938

Thus there emerged a deep connection between the crisis of the social and political structure of Spain and the hopes that had arisen in the popular mind after the proclamation of the republican system. This connection explains not only the enthusiastic and militant participation of the people in the defence of the Republic, but also the profound democratic character of the armed struggle of 1936 to 1939.

This connection also explains the unity of the democratic forces, which survived the whole course of the war. Popular initiative made it possible to overcome the disorganisation caused by the revolt and to create the basic—administrative, economic and military—elements of the new state and lay the foundation of a society that would differ fundamentally from its predecessor. Finally, the above-mentioned connection between the crisis of the whole previous system and the hopes of people was also to a considerable extent characteristic of the activity of the most progressive political forces of the Republic.

"We," said José Díaz, Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, a few days before the decisive victory in the elections to the Popular Front in 1936, "are the continuators of those who have given their lives for the freedom of Spain. All that is progressive in Spanish history belongs to the people."<sup>1</sup> Díaz demanded satisfaction

<sup>1</sup> José Díaz, *Tres años de lucha*, Ediciones Europa-America, Paris-Mexico-Nueva York, 1939, p. 89.

of the most urgent and specific needs of the poor people, and provision of human conditions of life for the dispossessed. Here he found arguments for a broad mobilisation of the masses to solve both immediate, pressing problems and the most general structural questions determining the democratic, progressive character of the Republic.

"We don't want the peasants to go on eating grass," Díaz continued, "we want them to be fed by what is produced in the fields that they till, we want them to be able to exchange their surpluses with the workers of the cities for the goods that they produce. We want a Spain in which the intellectuals, the doctors, the men of science and art can serve the people and not a clique of exploiters. We want the universities to open their doors to the workers, to the people. . . . We want the doctors to treat the workers and all poor people. We want to have a Spain where it is impossible for such crimes and cruelties to be committed as were committed against our brothers in Asturias, whose only fault was that they wanted to build a just Spain. We want a Spain where the working people have bread, work and freedom."<sup>1</sup>

The battle that in this situation the mass of the people continued urgently required that they should be united at a higher level and that a more effective social and military organisation should be set up. This problem was complicated by the diversity of the forces taking part in the Spanish popular movement and by the influence of specific national factors due to differences in the processes of historical development and the specific features of the formation of separate national groups (Basques, Catalonians, Galicians). The difficulties were also due to the uneven development of various political forces taking part in the popular movement and the wholly understandable hostility of the masses (for centuries they had experienced the harshest types of government) to any forms of discipline that remotely suggested the oppression from which they wished to liberate themselves.

In the face of all these difficulties it was essential to win massive support for the united front and to rally all anti-fascists. "You wonder what can be set against an armed and crafty enemy with all the cruel machinery of suppression at his disposal," José Díaz asked at one of the meetings. "Is enthusiasm alone enough? This enthusiasm must be embodied in a strong organisation that can develop the struggle and bring us to victory over reaction and fascism. Mere wishes and enthusiasm are not enough. There must be organisation and still more organisation."

The dilemma that confronted Spain was clear: "Either democracy would conquer fascism or fascism would destroy democracy; either the revolution would triumph over counter-revolution or

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-91.



Cada vez que en Ginebra, o en cualquier otra parte, he sostenido el punto de vista del Gobierno español en pro de la retirada de los combatientes no-españoles, mi primera y mas honda preocupacion ha sido dejar bien sentada la diferencia que existe entre unos "voluntarios" y otros.

Los que invaden el territorio español por orden de sus amos, y los que vienen a defenderlo convenidos certteramente de que en España se libraba la batalla definitiva por la democracia y por la paz de Europa.

¡Comaradas de las Brigadas internacionales, Vanguardia gloriosa del antifascismo mundial, ciudadanos de honor del Madrid heroico y de la España vencedora de mañana; el lenguaje español tan rico en matices y vocablos, no nos da aquí ninguna palabra suficiente para expresar, con nuestra admiración hacia vosotros, nuestra gratitud!

Julio Alvarez del Vayo

Each time I speak in Geneva or elsewhere supporting the Spanish Government's stand on the recall of the non-Spanish combatants, I emphasize the difference between the one kind of "volunteers" and the other. Some invaded Spain on orders from their rulers, others came to defend it, deeply convinced that a decisive battle for democracy and for peace in Europe was developing in Spain. Comrades from the International Brigades, the glorious vanguard of world anti-fascism, honorary citizens of heroic Madrid and Spain that will be victorious tomorrow, there are no words in the Spanish language, capable of expressing the subtlest shades of feeling, that can convey our admiration for you and our gratitude!

Julio Alvarez del Vayo

counter-revolution would turn Spain into a country of poverty, starvation and terror." "We want to avoid this," said Díaz on the eve of the February elections of 1936, "this is why we propose setting up a popular bloc now and preserving it after victory at the elections so that the bourgeois-democratic revolution will develop consistently and lead—at this first stage—to something that has not yet been realised in our country and that the French revolution achieved in 1789—to the abolition of the feudal survivals that are still one of the material pillars of reaction."<sup>1</sup>

As we know, as soon as the results of the Popular Front victory in the elections on February 16, 1936 were published, the reactionaries began preparing a coup d'état that would have nullified the expression of the people's will. Reaction steered a course towards overt fascism and sought to achieve its ends with the help of the military, including a group of generals, the so-called Africanists.<sup>2</sup>

The victory of the Popular Front in Spain was followed a little later by its victory in France. It was becoming clear that this was an upsurge of the mass of the people capable of barring the road to fascism in Europe and promoting the policy of collective security which the Soviet Union was at the time pursuing in the name of peace.

Reinforcement of the front of anti-fascist democracy could have become a sound bulwark of peace in Europe, a counterweight to Hitler's revanchism, which constituted the greatest threat to world peace, and a counterweight to the military adventures of Mussolini in Africa and the Mediterranean area.

The reactionary Spanish oligarchy chose the path of fascism. To save the Republic and democracy in Spain it was essential to thwart the conspiracy of reaction, to widen the mass base of the republican system, to disarm the reactionary forces and to strike at the very foundations of their influence and power.

This made it urgently necessary to implement in full and as quickly as possible the most important demands of the programme of the Popular Front: uncompensated confiscation of the estates of the big landlords, the church and the monasteries, and their immediate transfer free of charge to the poor peasants and agricultural workers; liberation of the overseas territories oppressed by Spanish imperialists; the rights of self-government and self-determination for Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia; and a general improvement of living and working conditions for the working class.

In the complex and eventful situation of those days the vanguard of the working class made use of the experience it had acquired in the battles of the Black Two-Year Period and in the process

<sup>1</sup> José Díaz, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Africanists—the most reactionary section of the officer caste of the Spanish army, which had made their career during punitive expeditions against the population of the Spanish colonies in Africa.—Ed.





Dolores Ibarruri, member of the Political Bureau of the Spanish Communist Party's Central Committee, addressing officers and men of the International Brigades

of rallying democratic forces in the struggle for the victory of the Popular Front in the elections. This prepared the ground for a mass counter-attack against the imminent military-fascist revolt. The operations designed to alert people to the danger of the military plot that was being hatched in secret merged with the concrete measures taken by the republican forces to strengthen their ties with the masses. Steps were taken to build up the Anti-Fascist Workers' and Peasants' Militia, which had been founded in 1933 to combat the fascist *pistoleros*, and which in July 1936 formed the organisational core of the heroic *milicianos*,<sup>1</sup> which were the first to take up arms against the insurgent generals.

When the time came to fight for the Republic it was the working class that gave the people unity and that braced their fighting spirit, their determination and inherent sense of organisation. The people were well aware of the aims of the struggle: the Republic was not a mere fetish or label for them; despite all its serious shortcomings, it was not only the sum total of their democratic gains

<sup>1</sup> *Milicianos*—soldiers of the People's Militia; volunteer armed detachments set up by political parties and trade unions to defend the Republic from the military-fascist insurgents. The most numerous, disciplined and efficient fighting force of the People's Militia was the famous 5th Regiment, formed by the Communist Party of Spain. The ranks of the 5th Regiment produced many talented organisers and leaders of the Republic's armed forces, and its numerous battalions formed the nucleus of the regular units of the new Republican Army.—Ed.

but also the point of departure for the waging of more decisive social and political battles.

The counter-offensive against fascism followed immediately thanks to the vigilance and initiative of the alerted masses of the people. The people answered the fascist revolt by an immediate general political strike, by universal arming of the masses on their own initiative (later legalised by the republican authorities), by lightning assaults on the fascist barracks and strong points, by street demonstrations and establishment of control over populated areas.

The long and persistent struggle for unity during the period preceding the fascist revolt resulted at the dramatic moment of the Franco attack in joint action in response to appeals by the Communist and Socialist parties. There was an obvious continuity between the phase before July 18 and the new phase that began with the struggle by the republican and anti-fascist forces.

José Díaz in one of his radio speeches generalised the objectives of the struggle as follows: "What is the Spanish people fighting for? It is defending its freedoms and democratic rights against fascism, against the military traitors who wish to condemn our country to barbarity, poverty and starvation. The Communist Party is in the front rank of this struggle for defence of the democratic Republic. In face of the fascist threat we have risen to defend our right and the people's right to life. We are determined that our people shall not experience the disgrace of a fascist regime. We want to live in peace with the peoples of the whole world."<sup>1</sup>

The counter-offensive of the people's united forces prevented the fascists from achieving their planned objectives. The navy remained almost totally on the side of the Republic. A large part of the African army was stranded on Moroccan territory. Of the four columns detailed for an assault on Madrid only two were able to move, but even they were halted at the Sierra Heights. Santander and Vascongadas on which the insurgent generals had placed their hopes remained in the hands of the people.

Eight days after the revolt had begun the German diplomatic representative in Madrid informed Berlin on the situation stating that unless something unexpected happened there was little hope that the military revolt would be successful. It was then that the Italian fascists decided to launch their mass invasion of Spain. Italian ships and aircraft transported the main forces of the insurgents from Morocco to the metropolis. Then came the invasion by regular fascist divisions from Italy, the special nazi Condor Legion, the Heinkels and Junkers of the German air force.

The civil war in Spain assumed a different character. The war unleashed by world fascism against the Spanish people now

<sup>1</sup> José Díaz, op. cit., pp. 260-61.





The people of Barcelona give a warm send-off to volunteers of the International Brigades

emerged as the first stage of fascist aggression against the peoples of Europe. Realisation of this fact by the democratic forces of the whole world stimulated more concrete and tangible aid for the Spanish Republic. Volunteers began to pour in, eager to fight Spanish and world fascism.

Thus the organisation of the International Brigades began as an expression of the idea of the Popular Front. They put themselves at the disposal of the Spanish people and its government agencies.

From the very outset it was decided that the international military formations would be part of the regular Spanish Republican Army and come under the command of its General Staff, that their commanders and commissars would be enlisted in the Spanish army and that its discipline would apply to them, that the banner of the International Brigades was the banner of the Spanish Republic. At the same time the International Brigades were allowed to carry also a red banner as a symbol of international solidarity.

The International Brigades fought valiantly in defence of Madrid and afterwards took part in all the main battles on Spanish soil. Their heroism was an inspiration to the world.

At the mustering point of the International Brigades in the town of Albacete volunteers arrived at the rate of about six hundred to seven hundred per week. The total in the period from autumn 1936 to summer 1938 exceeded 30,000, who came from nearly all the

countries of Europe, from North and South America and even from Africa, India and China.

This book provides yet another affirmation of the valuable contribution that the International Brigades made to the struggle of the Spanish people; when the new Republican Army was formed out of the detachments of the People's Militia the international units set an example of order and discipline. But the main service and fundamental role in the cause of defending the Republic against the aggression of the insurgent generals, Italian fascism and German nazism belong, of course, to the Spanish people themselves—at the beginning, to the detachments of the People's Militia, and later to the Republican Army.

When the Republican Government under pressure from the so-called democratic governments and the League of Nations decided in September 1938 to withdraw from the front all non-Spanish soldiers, the population of Barcelona mounted a massive demonstration of welcome in the name of the whole Spanish Republic for the volunteers who had come to defend Spain and who were now bidding her farewell, leaving forever on her soil many of their best comrades who had fallen in battle.

On this occasion Dolores Ibarruri, La Pasionaria, addressed all women of Spain: "Mothers! Women! When the years pass and the wounds of war are staunch; when a present of freedom, peace and well-being dispels the memories of the sorrowful and bloody days of the past; when feelings of rancour are dying away and all Spaniards feel equal pride in their free country—then speak to your children. Tell them of the men of the International Brigades!

"Tell them how, coming over seas and mountains, crossing frontiers, bristling with bayonets and watched for by ravening dogs thirsty to tear at their flesh, these men reached our country as Crusaders of Freedom, to fight and die for the freedom and independence of Spain over which hung the threat of German and Italian fascism. They gave up everything: love, country, home, fortune, mothers, wives, brothers and children and came to say to us: 'We are here! Your cause, the cause of Spain, is ours; it is the common cause of all advanced and progressive mankind.'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dolores Ibarruri, *En la lucha. Palabras y hechos, 1936-1939*, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 355.



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## THE WAR IN SPAIN AND THE STRUGGLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT FOR UNITY OF THE ANTI-FASCIST FORCES

The valiant struggle of the Spanish people for freedom and independence against the military-fascist revolt and the intervention of the fascist states—Germany and Italy—roused an unprecedentedly broad movement of solidarity. Millions of people in various countries contributed their mite to the cause of aid for the Spanish Republic.

The tremendous scope of this movement had been prepared by years of active anti-war and anti-fascist struggle by the working people in many countries, developed on the initiative of the Communist parties united in the Communist International. The historic service performed by the Comintern lay in its timely noting of the growing danger of a new imperialist war and its accurate indication of the sources of this danger—European, particularly German, fascism and Japanese militarism. On the other hand, the reformist leaders of Social-Democracy, like the liberal groups among the democratic public, persisted for a long time in denying the danger of war.

On January 1, 1933, a conference of Communist parties of nine European countries—Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Poland, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Luxembourg—was held in Essen, in the centre of the Ruhr. It passed important decisions on organisation of joint action by the proletariat of individual countries. Specifically, it recommended that there should be "general anti-war demonstrations by people who have suffered from war, women, young people, athletes, writers, artists, actors, doctors, engineers and other workers in the intellectual field". International campaigns were to be organised against the white terror, against the punitive expeditions, executions and physical extermination of revolutionary fighters. The resolution stressed the significance of the Amsterdam anti-war movement and Communists were called

upon to take an active part in it.<sup>1</sup> So the Communists sought and found general democratic, mass forms of struggle against the threat of war.

In 1933 alone, on the initiative of the International Committee Against Imperialist War, set up by the Amsterdam anti-war congress, several impressive international gatherings were held that placed the struggle against war and fascism in the focus of public opinion and rallied all fighters for peace, from Communists to pacifists, from proletarians to British Tories.

The European anti-fascist congress in Paris, the Latin American anti-war congress in Montevideo, the anti-war conference of the Scandinavian countries in Copenhagen, the US anti-war congress in New York, the Asian anti-war congress in Shanghai, the international congress of youth against war in Paris—such is a by no means complete list of the anti-war forums of 1933.

Right up to the outbreak of war in Spain the anti-war movement marched from strength to strength. It spread from the congress halls to the streets and squares of cities. The anti-war slogans merged with demands to bar the road to fascism, with campaigns in defence of the victims of fascist persecution and murder. In 1935 and 1936 May Day demonstrations were held in many countries under the slogans of struggle against war and fascism. The events in Spain endowed this movement with new strength and extended its influence on the broad masses.

By this time the international communist movement in the shape of the decisions of the 7th Congress of the Comintern (1935) completed the work of formulating a strategic and tactical policy suitable to the new conditions. The struggle against fascism as the main task, defence of democratic regimes, alliance with all political and social forces opposing fascism and war—such were the main features of this policy. As history has shown, the decisions of the 7th Congress helped to bring together the democratic forces in a number of countries in an anti-fascist Popular Front.

In France, owing to the joint efforts of the Communists, Socialists and Radicals, the attempt at a fascist coup d'état in February 1934 was defeated. The Communist Party of Spain by its consistent adherence to the policy of the Popular Front promoted the victory of democracy over the forces of reaction and fascism at the general elections in 1936, the crushing of the military fascist revolt of July 18 in the main centres throughout the country, and later the organisation of popular resistance to the Italo-German invasion.

The international communist movement did everything possible to help the working people of Spain in dealing with the complex

<sup>1</sup> *Rote Fahne*, January 10, 1933. The anti-war movement dates its history from the Amsterdam international congress held on August 27-29, 1932.



problems of consolidation of the Popular Front and organisation of the defence of the Republic, and in protecting the democratic system in Spain. Prominent figures in the communist movement—Palmiro Togliatti, Victorio Codovilla, Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos, Wilhelm Pieck, Harry Pollitt, Tim Buck and many others—made a great contribution to the struggle of the Spanish people and its vanguard, the Communist Party of Spain.

The principal role in the formation and fighting leadership of the International Brigades, the pride and fighting force of the international solidarity movement, was played by well-tested members of the Communist parties: Luigi Longo, André Marty, Franz Dahlem, Giuseppe Di Vittorio, Karlo Lukanov, Ferdinand Kozovsky, Ralph Fox, John Cornford, Ferenc Münnich, Máté Zalka, Karol Swierczewski, Vladimir Čopić, Veljko Vlahović and others. The revolutionary experience and Marxist-Leninist training of these Communists helped them, together with the anti-fascists of various other parties, to deal with a difficult and historically unprecedented task, that of welding together tens of thousands of enthusiastic volunteers without military training, speaking different languages, differing in nationality, social status, cultural level and political beliefs, to form the regular military units of the Republican Army—the International Brigades that were models of organisation and discipline, capable of fighting the regular army of the insurgents and interventionists and inflicting upon it heavy defeats.

As the valiant struggle of the Spanish people developed, the masses in the various countries became increasingly aware that in Spain not only the fate of the Spanish people but that of all progressive humanity was being decided.

The Soviet Union, which rendered all-round political, material and military aid to the Spanish Republic, once again showed itself to be the bastion of all forces of freedom and world peace. At the same time the participants in the international movement of solidarity saw more and more clearly that at this crucial moment the Spanish people needed not only aid in the shape of food, clothing and medical supplies. Confronted with a cruel and ruthless enemy—fascist Germany and Italy who without hindrance and in unlimited quantities were sending military equipment and troops to Spain—the Spanish people could win through only if the legitimate right of the government of the Republic to purchase arms abroad was restored. A strong arm was needed to stop the governments and ruling classes of a number of countries from pursuing a policy of appeasing the aggressor.

The mass of the people in the non-fascist countries, particularly Britain and France, and also the U.S.A., demanded a change of policy from their governments. But to achieve success, to set up an unbreakable peace front in all countries, there had to be unity of

working class action in every country and on an international scale, and this was the task that was set by the Communist International.

In the autumn of 1935, after the 7th Congress of the Communist International, at which Georgy Dimitrov proved the need to bring together in a Popular Front all the forces defending democracy and freedom, the Comintern made a proposal to the Labour and Socialist International that there should be joint action in every country and on an international scale against the threat of aggression by fascist Italy in Ethiopia.

In his letter of September 25, 1935, Dimitrov wrote to the Secretariat of the Socialist International that what had been done so far was still not enough in the face of this grave danger. The efforts of both Internationals to save peace must be united. Both Internationals should act in concord and by their joint efforts thwart the plans of the fascist warmongers.

Joint action by both Internationals would rouse the working class, which would also bring in its train peace supporters from other classes of the population. It would rouse whole peoples to take part in the struggle for peace. It would call to life such a powerful movement against war that its impact would compel the League of Nations to take more effective action against the aggression of Italian and German fascism.

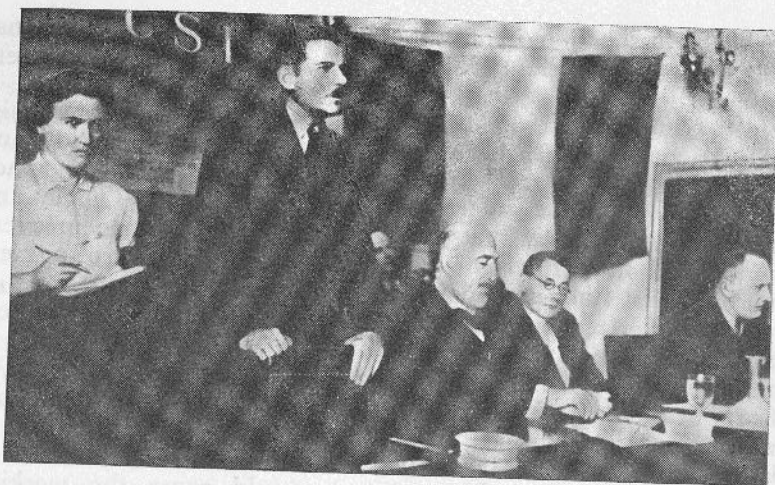
It was still not too late to prevent the terrible disaster towards which the fascist criminals were pushing humanity.

Only on October 15, 1935, after the second letter from the Comintern, of October 7, was an answer received. Friedrich Adler, the Secretary of the Socialist International, wrote: "With reference to the proposal of the Communist International for a conference with four of their representatives, the Socialist parties of Great Britain, Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Czechoslovakia have declared that they cannot agree to accept this proposal, first, on account of the composition of the delegation of the Communist International and second, because they renounce all joint action with the Communist parties of their countries and all joint action of the two Internationals.

"Since the Executive Committee of the LSI is bound to consider the point of view of these powerful parties of the working class, it cannot accept the proposal of the Communist International."

The only result of Dimitrov's letters was a message from Adler to the effect that the Chairman and the Secretary of the Socialist International were prepared to meet representatives of the Comintern for an exchange of information. The meeting which took place between Emile Vandervelde, Friedrich Adler, Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez came to nothing. Nevertheless Dimitrov in his letter of October 27, 1935 to the leaders of the Socialist Interna-





Dr. Barsky addressing an international conference on medical aid to Republican Spain in Paris in July 1937

tional again declared "the readiness of the Comintern to begin negotiations on joint action at any moment".

Thus the socialist leaders sacrificed the general interests of the working class and all working people to anti-communist prejudices and, in some countries, to a policy of co-operation with the bourgeoisie.

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When the fascist revolt broke out on July 18, 1936, a dangerous situation was created for the Republic and in view of the insurgents' advance on Madrid Marcel Cachin and Maurice Thorez demanded, in the name of the Comintern, a meeting with the representatives of the Socialist International. On October 14 they met Louis de Brouckère, Chairman of the Socialist International, and Friedrich Adler. But the Socialist leaders refused to accept the Comintern's proposal to call an international conference on measures to be taken by all working-class organisations to help Spain.

In the final months of 1936, when the fascist assault columns had already penetrated the Madrid city boundary and the fate of the Republican capital hung by a thread, the Comintern three times—October 25, November 7 and December 28—appealed to the leaders of the Socialist International proposing joint action for urgent assistance to the Republic. But the leaders of the Labour and Socialist International stubbornly maintained their position of renouncing joint action.

On March 11, 1937 an international conference of the Socialist International on the question of Spain was held in London. Three days before the conference—March 8—the Italian interventionists had launched a major offensive on the Guadalajara sector. Flushed with their first successes, the fascist aggressors were advancing on Madrid. The Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julio Alvarez del Vayo, a Socialist, appealed to the conference to help Spain. The Socialist Pascual Thomas, speaking on behalf of the Spanish trade unions, proposed the calling of a world conference with the participation of the Socialist International, the International Association of Trade Unions, the Comintern and the trade unions of the Soviet Union and the United States. Léon Jouhaux read out a resolution of the French General Confederation of Labour which stated: "Unity of action of all organisations of the working class must be ultimately realised on an international scale." In reply to the speeches of his colleagues Walter Citrine, the leader of the British trade unions, declared that a united front would be "undesirable". Another labourite, Ernest Bevin, said even more bluntly that the British labour movement would not allow the war in Spain to exert any influence on its decision or tactics. Because of the labourites' negative position the conference passed a useless, vacuous resolution. The Spanish walked out of the conference, stating: "We asked for arms and they gave us a slip of paper." If the fate of Spain had depended on the decision of the Labour and Socialist International, the Spanish Republic would even then have ceased to exist. But the young Republican Army and the international volunteers in its ranks won at Guadalajara the first major victory over Italian and world fascism.

At that time even the members of the Socialist International who were in Spain—Pietro Nenni, Julius Deutsch, Jean Dalvigne—began to act with the Communists—Luigi Longo and Franz Dahlem—in making joint appeals for resolute international measures in aid of the Spanish Republic.

The Communist International mobilised an active movement of solidarity in all countries. Representatives of 21 Communist parties gathered for the conference of April 21, 1937 in Paris and took specific decisions on joint organisation of measures to aid Spain. They discussed how joint measures could be carried out in each country. These decisions were in line with the ardent desire of the popular masses for unity. The Socialist leaders could not ignore this desire and also the popularity that the international volunteers had won throughout the world. In April 1937 Walter Schevenels and Friedrich Adler visited Spain. As guests of the International Brigades they were ungrudging in their praise and promises. Friedrich Adler, welcoming the 14th International Brigade, declared that "the international volunteers have



set an example of a united front that is worthy of imitation. And Schevenels, on learning of the lack of arms in the Franco-Belgian battalion, exclaimed: "Comrades, I promise you you will get arms." But these words were not borne out by deeds.

In May 1937 the savage bombardment of Almería by the German navy and the declaration of the Nazi leaders that they reserved freedom of action in regard to Spain showed the whole world that the intervention of German and Italian fascism in Spain was assuming an even greater scale. World indignation was aroused by the criminal acts of the fascist gangsters, who had destroyed a peaceful city and murdered thousands of women and children. In France and Britain mass protest against the policy of "non-intervention" gathered strength.

Under these circumstances the Spanish Communist and Socialist parties and the Spanish General Union of Workers appealed to both Internationals and also to the International Trade Union Association for assistance. Georgy Dimitrov immediately suggested to Chairman of the Socialist International de Brouckère that they should meet and agree to set up a committee of the three international organisations for joint action to prevent the military intervention of Germany and Italy against the Spanish Republic. De Brouckère in his reply to this proposal asserted that neither he nor Adler had powers to set up such a committee. Dimitrov repeated his proposal in a telegram, pointing out the inconsistency of de Brouckère's motives. Finally the latter agreed to meet the delegates of the Comintern for an exchange of opinion. The meeting took place on June 21, 1937 in the French town of Annemasse. It was attended by Luigi Longo, Pedro Checa and Franz Dahlem from the Comintern and de Brouckère and Adler from the Labour and Socialist International. This event awakened hope in the hearts of millions of working people. The Comintern representatives made concrete proposals for joint action by both Internationals in defence of the Spanish Republic. At Annemasse an agreement was reached containing the following three points: first, it was established that both Internationals advanced similar demands; second, it was acknowledged that at the present moment more than at any other time action in defence of Spain should be taken in every possible field, by general agreement, in order to avoid friction; third, both delegations recognised the need for discussions on specific measures to render moral and material support to the Spanish people.

It appeared that at last a foundation had been created for united action by the working class, but once again the old enemies of unity appeared on the scene. The labour leaders dissociated themselves from de Brouckère and Adler with the result that both of them resigned. Subsequently they were recalled to their posts but,

as the facts showed, at the price of renouncing the joint action agreed upon in Annemasse.

On June 26, 1937, after the fall of Bilbao, the Basque capital, Dimitrov again appealed to the Socialists, pointing out the danger that threatened Asturias and suggesting practical measures to accelerate joint aid. He proposed:

Communists and Socialists should jointly appeal or in some other form to the governments of their countries, demanding support for the Annemasse Agreement;

both Internationals should jointly appeal to the League of Nations, demanding that the Charter of the League should be applied to Spain;

both Internationals should mobilise all international proletarian organisations and world public opinion in support of these demands.

On July 9 de Brouckère and Adler met Cachin and Thorez. The Comintern representatives developed and further defined Dimitrov's proposals as follows: (1) both Internationals should support action to be organised by the International Committee for Aid to Republican Spain (ICARS) and the International Youth Committee for Republican Spain on July 18, the anniversary of the fascist revolt; (2) both Internationals should in future support the activities of the ICARS; (3) they should send a joint deputation to the League of Nations with a demand for recognition of Spain's rights as a member of the League of Nations; (4) both Internationals should agree at once to joint, co-ordinated measures for increased aid to the Spanish people, evacuated women and children, and for the further evacuation of women and children, particularly from Northern Spain.

The communiqué on this meeting stated: as a result of an exchange of opinion both sides have reached agreement regarding measures to be taken for the benefit of Republican Spain.

In July the Republican Army launched a big offensive operation at Brunete with the objective of helping Asturias and the whole Republican North. At that time de Brouckère visited Spain. He took part in many meetings held in the battalions of the International Brigades and gave many assurances and promises, but his deeds were not as good as his words.

In October the North fell in spite of the Republican Army's diversionary offensive which liberated Quinto and Belchite. Now the fascists' northern forces constituted an additional threat to Madrid and the whole Republic. In this situation the Communist and Socialist parties of Spain once again appealed to the two Internationals for joint action in the spirit of Annemasse under the slogan of "Stop Aid to Franco". Both working-class parties demanded help to prevent the brutal fascist terror in Asturias; they proposed a general boycott of goods exported from territory occupied



by the fascists and intensification of the campaign for the recall from Spain of all foreign troops, including the Moroccans and the Foreign Legion. But this appeal, like all the other appeals of the Spanish fighters and the efforts of the Communist International to reach agreement on joint action by the international centres of the working-class movement, achieved no results. The negative position of the leaders of the Social-Democratic parties did tremendous harm to the cause of the Spanish Republic and the whole anti-fascist and anti-war movement. Moreover, in rejecting all proposals for international agreement the Right-wing leaders of the Socialist International and the International Association of Trade Unions sought to destroy the co-operation of all proletarian and democratic forces that had been achieved within the framework of the Popular Front in Spain.

The Spanish Republic was able to wage a prolonged struggle lasting almost three years in the relatively small area of the Pyrenean Peninsula under conditions of blockade and the enemy's tremendous superiority in arms mainly because unity of action was achieved in the Spanish working class and a close alliance was formed between the working class and the peasantry, because the masses were united within the anti-fascist Popular Front and cemented by the Communist Party of Spain. For this reason attempts to undermine the unity of the Popular Front in Spain, and particularly the co-operation between the Socialist and Communist parties, attempts made by the Right-wing leaders of the Socialist International, were equivalent to aiding the enemies of the Spanish Republic. The wavering and capitulatory elements in the ranks of the Spanish Popular Front, to be found among the bourgeois Republicans and Right-wing Socialists, gained support in the splitting policy of the leaders of the French Socialist Party, which at the end of 1937 virtually tore up the agreement on joint action with the Communist Party, thus bringing about the collapse of the Popular Front in France.

Toeing the line of the bourgeois governments of their countries, the Right-wing leaders of the Socialist International supported the Munich agreement of September 1938, which sanctioned the enslavement of the peoples of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany and helped the strangling of the Spanish Republic by German-Italian fascism.

Six months later, in March 1939, these leaders welcomed the capitulatory conspiracy against the government of the Republic, led by the Right-wing Socialist Besteiro and Colonel Casado. Thus the line adopted by the Socialist International of stubborn refusal to take joint action with the revolutionary vanguard of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist forces—the Communist International—for aid to the Spanish people and its struggle against fascist aggression culminated in what amounted to solidarity with the aggression



Louis de Brouckère, Luigi Longo and Franz Dahlem at a meeting of international volunteers in Albacete

sors and their accomplices. This anti-working-class and anti-democratic position hastened the collapse of the Socialist International. A few weeks after the defeat of the Spanish Republic the Chairman and Secretary of the Socialist International, de Brouckère and Adler, resigned their posts.

The Communist International rendered active support and assistance to the fighting Spanish people to the very end of the national-revolutionary war. After its tragic outcome the efforts of the Communist parties were transferred to helping refugees from Spain, former fighters in the Republican Army and the International Brigades interned in French camps, and to mobilising world opinion against the terror campaign in Spain.

The efforts of the Communist International to achieve unity of action of the whole international working-class movement in the struggle against the fascist military aggression in Spain were not fruitless. Joint action was achieved in practice in many countries, where on the initiative of the Communists all workers and progressive organisations mounted a united front in defence of the Spanish Republic. This brought into being a broad mass movement of solidarity embracing nearly all countries of the globe. It was the most powerful expression of solidarity since the time of the imperialist intervention against the Land of Soviets and the "Hands off Soviet Russia!" movement.



This experience of a policy of unity and also the positive results of the Communist Party of Spain co-operation within the framework of the Popular Front were widely used in organising resistance to fascism during the Second World War and in the struggle for the democratic development of the world in the post-war period.

Thus the events of 1936 to 1939 went down in the history of the international proletarian and democratic movement as an important stage in the development of the spirit of solidarity, of effective proletarian internationalism, and of enriching the methods and forms of struggle for unification of all anti-fascist and anti-war forces.

## ARGENTINA

A few days after the beginning of the fascist generals' revolt against the Spanish Republic a committee of aid for the Government of the Popular Front was set up in Argentina. The committee immediately launched a vigorous campaign throughout the country. One of its founders had been the Spanish Patronate for Aid to the Victims of Fascism (PEAVA)—an organisation set up during the Black Two-Year Period of the temporary triumph of reaction in Spain after the uprising of the Asturian miners had been suppressed in October 1934. In the summer of 1936, a weekly magazine *La Voz de España*, subsequently called *La Nueva España*, which gave a truthful account of Spanish events, began to appear in Argentina.

The working people of Argentina felt deeply committed to the struggle of the Spanish Republic for freedom and independence. In the first days of August 1936 the citizens of the small town of Coronel Dorrego, southwest of Buenos Aires, and the poor peasants of this province assembled at the Spanish Consulate and decided to set up a junta to help the Spanish Republic. Because the poor peasants who constituted the majority of the population of Argentina would find it difficult to make monetary contributions, it was decided that a collection of farm produce should be organised. The campaign was so successful that large sheds were needed to store the grain and cereals that were delivered to the aid fund not only by peasants but also by workers, bakers and shop-keepers. In the Chaco province, and also in the poorest districts of Argentina, Santiago del Estero and Misiones, people also collected wool and cotton.

The broad movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic and help for the Republic was headed by the Communist Party of Argentina. On its initiative in August 1936, 212 local Aid the Spanish People committees were set up, including committees in Santa Fé, Mendoza, Bahia Blanca and other towns. One of the



forms of activity of these committees was the collection of food rations for the men of the Republican Army. In February 1937, 5,804 collectors gathered 52,080 rations to a value of 16,144 pesos; in March of the same year 18,306 people gathered 114,480 rations to a value of 34,558 pesos, and six months later the number of collectors had increased to 36,995, and the number of rations collected, to 328,406, valued at 101,805 pesos.

On March 7, 1937, the first consignment was sent to the fund of the International Trade Union Committee for Aid to the Spanish People (Paris). It consisted of eighteen bales of clothing, four crates of food and a ton of flour. Regular deliveries continued. By April 1938 the total value of material help for Spain amounted to six million pesos, or 2.5 million dollars. By November 7, 1938 thirty tons of dried and condensed milk had been sent to Spain and money for the purchase of another thirty tons of milk had been sent to France.

The workers' May Day demonstration in 1937 was held under the slogan of Aid for and Solidarity with Spain. Besides the red flag and national Argentina flag the banners of the Spanish Republic flew over the columns. Ambulances that were to be dispatched to Spain drove in front of the demonstrators. A big meeting was held to welcome the Spanish Ambassador, Dr. Angel Osorio y Gallardo. Five thousand people met him at the port and accompanied him to the embassy. On the first anniversary of the defence of Madrid a meeting was held in the Luna Park and a collection was made to buy food for the fighters of the Republican Army and their children.

A year after the outbreak of the fascist revolt in Spain hundreds of committees were active in Argentina: women's, youth, ambulance, and also emigre Spanish organisations, etc. They were united in their hatred of fascism and boundless admiration for the valour of the Spanish people. Help for fighting Spain had to be increased at all costs. The communist and progressive press called for increased aid and this was the subject of discussion at provincial Aid Spain congresses in Córdoba and Mendoza (May and July 1937) and finally at an illegal national congress held between the 7th and 9th of August, where unity of organisation was achieved.

More than ten public organisations approved the decision of the congress to set up a Federation for Organisation of Aid to the Spanish Republic (FOARE) whose function would be to co-ordinate the activity of all committees. The agreement to set up the federation was signed by three organisations of the Spanish emigres, four provincial organisations (Córdoba, Rosario, Mendoza and Bahía Blanca) and four national organisations. After a time the Argentinian Junta for Medical Aid to Republican Spain and the repatriation centre of the Spanish republicans joined the federation.

Later, in January 1939, it was decided at a plenary assembly of the organisations of the Buenos Aires province, united under the title of "Friends of the Spanish Republic", that they should also join the FOARE. Many political and trade-union people took an active part in the federation's work.

The magazine *La Nueva España* became the organ of the FOARE. It had a circulation of 40,000 copies, which sometimes rose to 90,000. Its reports gave reliable information on the military operations in Spain. The radio station "Radio Mitre" in Buenos Aires broadcast a daily bulletin of news from this weekly magazine. Later such broadcasts were banned by the government.

In the first months of the federation's activity over 167,000 pesos were collected in cash and 18,000 pesos worth of food supplies. On behalf of the International Co-operation and Information Committee for Aid to the Spanish Republic the federation used the money to purchase pencils and exercise books for Spanish school-children and for the "abolish illiteracy" brigades, and also tobacco for the fighting men. About 114,000 packets of cigarettes were sent to the Republican Army.

On the anniversary of the Spanish Republic, April 14, 1938, the federation sent the fighting people of Spain 500,000 francs.

In January 1938 a campaign for the collection of gifts for orphans whose parents had been killed during the war was launched. In April of the same year a large meeting to honour the Republic's anniversary was attended by the Spanish ambassador. Many prominent Argentinian cultural celebrities took part in the meeting. The arrival in Buenos Aires of the Spanish theatre company directed by the famous actress Margarita Xirgu with a repertoire containing plays by Federico García Lorca was yet another opportunity for the expression of solidarity with Spain.

In the autumn of 1938 meetings dedicated to the situation in Spain were held and special stamps were issued in aid of the Republic that sold quickly among the people of Argentina. October 12 (the day of the discovery of America by Columbus) was celebrated in Argentina as a National Aid Spain Day, which started the third winter campaign of help for the Republic. Over 50,000 people marched past the General Consulate of Spain in Buenos Aires on that day. The consul had to receive delegations and individual visitors expressing their solidarity with fighting Spain from eight in the morning to eleven at night. On the same day a large meeting organised by the Republican Spanish Club in Argentina was addressed by the Spanish ambassador. People sacrificed their last pennies for Spain. There were even cases when unemployed workers took off their coats and gave them in for dispatch to Spain. The day's collection came to more than 10,000 pesos. Between the 1st and 22nd of October, 1938, a sum of 620,000 French francs was collected for Republican Spain and a big transport of food, clothing



and footwear was dispatched. On the average the Argentinian people, who then numbered only 12 million, contributed 3 million francs a month. From the outbreak of hostilities in Spain to October 1938 fifty million francs were collected.

The activity of the FOARE was highly appreciated by the Spanish people and the international Aid Spain movement. Expressions of gratitude were received from members of the Republican Government, generals, outstanding figures among the intelligentsia, the International Red Aid people, youth associations and Aid Spain organisations in various countries.

On July 29, 1936, ten days after the outbreak of hostilities, a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) of Argentina took place with the participation of the trade-union secretaries of Buenos Aires. It sent a telegram of welcome to the General Union of Working People (UGT) of Spain as a sign of solidarity with the trade unions' struggle against fascism. "The CGT declares," the telegram stated, "that it has begun collecting funds throughout the country. The money collected will be handed over to the UGT of Spain."

The first contributions from the trade unions and donations from workers and office employees at factories and commercial firms started coming in at the beginning of August. On August 10 the CGT handed over to the UGT of Spain the first contribution of 20,000 francs.

Under the leadership of the CGT a Central Aid Commission was set up that included three sub-commissions: food and medical supplies, clothing and footwear, propaganda and collection of funds.

On January 15, 1937, the consignments for Spain comprised: 10 tons of condensed milk; 1,000 cases of corned beef (amounting to 144,000 soldiers' rations); 100 cases of lamb (or 1,400 soldiers' rations); 100 cases of tinned meat (or 1,400 soldiers' rations); 100 large crates of clothing and footwear; 50 kg of sweets for the children. Later another 1,100 cases of corned beef (13,200 tins) were sent off. The total value of aid rendered by the CGT to Spain up to April 1937 amounted to 366,715 pesos.

All rank-and-file members of the trade unions took an active part in collecting funds, but the reformist leaders of the CGT failed to attach due importance to this campaign. On April 30, 1937, the National Labour Federation of Builders and the Union of Construction Workers of the Federal Capital organised a fête in the Luna Park as a sign of solidarity with the Spanish Republic. It was attended by a huge number of people. The appeal to contribute a day's wages for the Spanish working people was greeted with enthusiasm. Another 100,000 pesos were added to the Aid Fund. But through the fault of the reformist leadership of the CGT this money was not passed on to the People's Government of Spain.

The organisations of the Spanish emigres in Argentina were also active in helping the Republic. Mention must be made of the Federation of Galician Societies, which was exceptionally united in spirit and had ten branches. The Asturian and Valencian committees of aid for the legitimate Spanish Government, the so-called Catalan House, the Friends of the Spanish Republic organisation and others.

The valiant struggle of the Spanish people for their independence helped to initiate a broad and well-organised women's movement in Argentina. The constituent assembly of the Argentinian Women's Committee for the protection of Spanish orphans, the first women's organisation in the country to take an active part in helping the Spanish people, was held in March 1937. During the fighting for Madrid the committee collected money to purchase an ambulance and provided it with personnel and medical equipment. Another five ambulances were sent later. In dozens of workshops, organised by active members in their apartments, diligent women's hands darned old clothes and made new ones, and knitted children's sweaters and socks. Women and children collected money to buy food for soldiers' rations. At the end of 1938 five thousand children's outfits made by women anti-fascists were sent off to Spain.

The women took an active part also in the work of the provincial committees. Quite often they were threatened by the police and the authorities. In the township of Algarrobo, for instance, despite constant police threats, the women took a particularly active part in the Aid Spain movement and organised a Committee of Aid for Spanish Children.

The Argentinian Junta for Medical Aid did a lot of work to provide the Republican Army with medical supplies. With the support of the workers and other employees of the pharmaceutical industry, and of doctors and nurses, medical posts and laboratories for making medicines were set up in Spain. The Junta also helped to provide the army and rear medical institutions with ambulances. Forty fully equipped ambulances costing 5,000 pesos, i.e., more than 2,000 dollars each, were sent to Spain. The last of them, after the defeat of the Republic, was transferred to Chile to care for the Spanish refugees who had arrived there on the S. S. *Winnipeg*.

Spurred by hatred of fascism, the young people of Argentina showed active solidarity with the Spanish people. The organisation of Young Friends of Republican Spain in Buenos Aires comprised Communists, Socialists and young people of other political trends, including many children of Spanish emigres. The young men and girls, schoolchildren, many of whom were for the first time taking part in the social life of their country under the banner of solidarity, enthusiastically collected money in city streets, organised wheat sheaf and carnation processions, and distributed thousands



of badges, post cards, leaflets and brochures exposing the crimes of fascism against the Spanish people.

On November 7, 1938, in the central cafés specially hired by Argentinian students anyone who liked could drink "a cup of the coffee that Mola had been going to drink in Madrid on November 7, 1936". The reference was to the boastful declaration of the fascist General Mola in October 1936 that Madrid was just about to be captured and he would order himself a cup of coffee there.

At the Avellaneda Club an auction was arranged for the "broom that will sweep Franco out of Spain": it brought in 500 pesos for Republican Spain. The 5th, 6th and 7th of November, 1938 were declared donation days for the Spanish Republic. This campaign was conducted under the slogan of youth unity.

In the Rosario province the Aid the Republic Junta produced a newspaper, *España Republicana*. The Jewish community organised a commission of help for the Spanish people, which published bulletins in two languages with a circulation of 16,000 copies. The money from the sale of the bulletin went to the aid fund. The newspapers *Galicia*, *España Republicana* and *Correo de Asturias*, organs of the provincial committees of the FOARE, were widely distributed.

The FOARE publishing house *La Nueva España*, and also the houses of other progressive organisations, put out a series of books about Spain with a special stress on the national-revolutionary war. The most famous of these were: *I Testify... One Year of Struggle in Free Spain* by the Spanish lawyer Antonio Ruiz Vilaplana; *Peasants of Spain in the Struggle for Land and Freedom* by B. Minlos; *Spain in Struggle: A History of the Civil War of 1936 and an Investigation of Its Social, Economic and Political Causes* by Jarry Gannes and Theodoro Repard; *The Armoured Rose* by Raul Gonzalez Tuñón; *Spain Versus Fascism* by Bernardo Edelman; *Spain, Its Struggle and Ideals* by Angel Osorio y Gallardo, etc. Each of these books had a printing of between five and ten thousand copies, which for those days was an unusual event in Argentina.

On the initiative of the *La Nueva España* publishing house there were showings of the films *The Heart of Spain*, *Children of Spain* and *Land of Spain*. Displays of photographs of battle episodes and views of cities reduced to rubble by the Italian and German air forces and photographs of homeless hungry children were organised in the capital and other cities.

Thousands of people responded to an appeal by the Spanish Patronate for Aid to the Victims of Fascism. It received postal orders for 50 centavos, 80 centavos and 1 peso. People gave what they could afford. The Argentinians also responded to the patronate's appeal to help the Spanish sailors charged with mutiny by the



Graves of volunteers of the International Brigades in Fuencarral, Madrid

Argentinian authorities; these sailors had taken over the ship *Cabo San Antonio* to stop it from going to Franco Spain.

The Italian community also took an active part in the solidarity movement. Many Italians then living in Argentina went to Spain to fight in the International Brigades.

The help that Argentina gave the Spanish people in money, clothes, food, medical supplies and medical equipment amounted to more than 4,000,000 dollars or 1,400 million Argentinian pesos at the present-day rate of exchange. The Argentinian Republic held a leading place in the amount of aid that it sent to Spain.

After the defeat of the Spanish Republic the FOARE and the Argentinian Union of Aid for the Victims of the Spanish War, along with democratic forces in Chile, its trade-union centre, the Chilean Committee of Aid for the Spanish People and the political parties in the Popular Front obtained permission for two thousand refugees to enter Chile. For each of them a surety of 3,000 francs had to be deposited. At the same time an agreement was achieved with the Chilean Aid Committee to set up a reserve fund for supporting the refugees until they could find work.

Nearly 2,200 refugees arrived on the S. S. *Winnipeg* and the FOARE, in accordance with its promise, transferred to the Chilean Aid Committee more than 1,000,000 Chilean pesos.

In the first months of 1940 a solidarity congress, organised by



the Argentinian Union of Aid for the Victims of the Spanish War, was held in Buenos Aires. The congress had to be conducted illegally. Its chairman was the outstanding representative of the Cuban intelligentsia, the writer Juan Marinello, and there were delegates from nearly all countries of Latin America and the United States. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda spoke at the congress. A decision was taken to continue the campaign in support of the Spanish Republic, to strengthen the movement of solidarity with the victims of fascism, to help the refugees and devote every effort to struggle against fascism, which had by then unleashed the Second World War.

The Argentinian patriots, particularly the Communists, were eager to help Spain in the International Brigades. More than 500 Argentinian volunteers, including many emigres from other countries—Italian building workers; Ukrainians and Poles from the Avellaneda and Beriso refrigerator plants; Yugoslavs from the oil-fields of Comodoro Rivadavia; Spaniards, Bulgarians and Germans from other industrial areas of the country—made their way to Spain illegally, at the risk of their lives.

Argentinian volunteers fought in the units of the Republican Army and the International Brigades: in the Thaelmann, Dabrowski, Garibaldi and other battalions.

The volunteers included the Communist Ortiz, commander of the 24th Brigade of the Republican Army; the Communist Jungman, a company commissar in the 13th International Brigade; Fanny Edelman, an active member of the Spanish section of the International Red Aid (IRA), at present a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Argentina; José Belloqui, a lieutenant in the Republican Army, later Central Committee member of the Communist Party of Argentina and secretary of the district party committee of the Buenos Aires province, Angel Ortelli, a commissar in the famous 11th Division, former leader of the Builders Trade Union; Elguer, a commissar in the medical service; Fierro, Raquel Levenson, Bernardo Edelman, José Manzanelli and many others.

The emigres who left Argentina for Spain include Max Doppler, who was killed in action commanding the famous Thaelmann Battalion; Captain Sieloff, one of the leaders of the Builders Trade Union; the Italian Bonano, a commissar in the Giuseppe Garibaldi Brigade, the Spaniard Manuel Seoane, a commander in one of the Galician guerrilla detachments, a former printer, who was shot by Franco's men. Among the Latin Americans who had emigrated to Argentina and then made the journey to Spain were the Bolivian Valenzuela and his wife, the Argentinian Communist, both of whom were killed during the defence of Madrid.

A group of Argentinian doctors worked in the medical service of the Spanish Republican Army right up to the last day of the war.

There is not sufficient space here to name all those who fought in Spain and held high the banner of anti-fascist solidarity of the Argentinian people and its working class. Many Argentinian volunteers honourably preserved the fighting traditions of the International Brigades in the concentration camps of Gurs and Argeles and continued them by taking part in the French Resistance.

The splendid mass movement of solidarity of the Argentinian working people with the Spanish people during the national-revolutionary war remains to this day a fine example to the young generation in the struggle for the national independence of Argentina.



## AUSTRIA

General Franco, who led the revolt against the Spanish Republic, represented reactionary forces of the very same kind that in February 1934 had destroyed in Austria the last vestiges of democracy, relying, like him, on the support of foreign fascist powers. On February 12, 1934, the workers of Austria tried to put up armed resistance to the advance of fascism. But the Schutzbund<sup>1</sup> detachments and also the Communists who fought with them were weakened by the fact that the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party and the trade unions did not participate in the struggle. The uprising was defeated and the Communist and Social-Democratic parties banned. Yet the workers' fighting spirit was not broken. When the great battle against fascism flared up in Spain, many Austrian anti-fascists, and particularly those who had taken part in the February fighting of 1934, saw it as a long-awaited chance of again taking up arms to defeat fascism—this time on Spanish soil. They joined the ranks of the fighters of the International Brigades.

"Learn from Spain!" was the title of an article about the Spanish events published in the March issue (1936) of *Rote Fahne*—the central organ of the Communist Party of Austria. The paper stressed the vital importance of the unity of action achieved between the Socialist and Communist parties of Spain on the basis of the revolutionary struggle against fascism, because it had become "the central factor that has united all true democrats and friends of freedom in a single anti-fascist Popular Front". The significance of the Popular Front in Spain, the role of unity, were also understood by some of the Social-Democrats.

On July 11, 1936, a week before the Franco generals' putsch, the Chancellor of Austria Schuschnigg concluded an agreement with Hitler. As the Austrian Communist Party's theoretical maga-

<sup>1</sup> Schutzbund was an armed organisation of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. It was set up in 1923 as a means of defence from fascist military detachments.—*Ed.*

zine *Weg und Ziel* noted in March 1937, while formally recognising the state independence of Austria, German fascism used this agreement to gain virtual control of its foreign policy. The plans that Germany and Italy had by that time already worked out for Spain had made it necessary to obtain as soon as possible a *modus vivendi* in respect of Austria.

When General Franco, who was acting in collusion with the fascist powers, attacked the Spanish Republic, bourgeois Austria took the side of the insurgents. Admittedly, the Austrian Government officially declared its non-intervention in Spanish affairs, but the bourgeois press from the first days of the fascist revolt set out to smear the Spanish Republic. In mid-August 1936 the government-inspired newspaper *Weltblatt* expressed its indignation that "in the last few days some papers have been publishing in a more or less veiled form statements expressing sympathy for the Popular Front", and demanded an effort to find "ways and means of putting a stop to this". For publishing truthful reports from Spain on the situation at the fronts the Vienna bourgeois-liberal newspaper *Tag* was fined by the Polizeipräsidium five hundred schillings and given a warning.

Information on Austrian military aid to Franco—for understandable reasons, far from complete—appeared only in the illegal working-class press. For example, the newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* reported on September 4, 1936 that the Vienna firm Gräf und Stift had sold the insurgents a consignment of 40 tanks and loaded them in Trieste for shipment to Spain. On November 19, 1936, the bulletin *Pressedienst der Roten Fahne* wrote: "We are informed by reliable sources that at the arms factory in Hirtenberg they are working three shifts of eight hours each. Forty per cent of the output goes to the Spanish insurgents. Ammunition is being sent to Portugal through the Hamburg transport firm Mathias Rothe."

The Austrian Government also facilitated recruitment of Austrians for Franco's army. The insurgent troops included Austrian nazis recruited in Austria itself as well as those who went to Germany and enlisted there in the Condor Legion. The *Pressedienst der Roten Fahne* of December 23, 1936 reported that on the initiative of the Aktion katholischer Adeliger (Aristocratic Catholic Action) nearly 200 Austrians joined the insurgent army in Spain. An officer of the fascist Heimwehr from Innsbruck Rudolf Penz returned from Spain to Austria to enlist new mercenaries there. Every recruit received 100 schillings and a free railway ticket (to Genoa, rest of the journey by ship), and in addition the members of his family were presented with a life insurance policy.

Big industrialists and financiers were approached to contribute funds to purchase arms for the insurgents.

Most of the 1,700 anti-fascist Austrians who fought in Spain arrived direct from Austria. Many of them had acquired the rudi-



ments of military training in the Schutzbund detachments and in the Communist worker self-defence groups; those who had participated in the street battles of February 1934 had a certain amount of fighting experience.

As soon as the Spanish people rose up in arms, many of the Schutzbund fighters, who after the suppression of the February uprising had found political asylum in the Soviet Union, hastened to their aid.

The overwhelming majority of the Austrian volunteers were members of the Austrian Communist Party or the Communist League of Youth; there were also Revolutionary Socialists<sup>1</sup> and non-party people from Austria in the International Brigades.

Doctor Julius Deutsch (a member of the Board of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party, in the past a leader of the Schutzbund, who arrived in Spain from emigration in Czechoslovakia and soon became a general of the Republican Army) wrote in the newspaper of the International Brigades *Le volontaire de la Liberté*: "In this great struggle it has come about of itself that the contradictions that up to now existed between anti-fascists have disappeared. Whether a man was in the past a Socialist or a Communist, here in Spain it is of no significance, which is something that would be hard to imagine in the rest of Europe."<sup>2</sup>

Of course, some disagreements and difficulties arose between Communists and Socialists when it came to taking practical action. Serious contradictions appeared after the POUM putsch in Barcelona in May 1937 over the question of the attitude to be adopted to Trotskyism, but this had no effect on the relations between the members of the International Brigades.

In Austria itself the illegal working-class organisations—revolutionary Socialists, the Communist Party, the Austrian section of IRA and the Free Trade Unions—invariably came out on the side of the Spanish Republic and their unity of action continued. A joint declaration of the Communist Party of Austria and the Party of Revolutionary Socialists, passed at the end of 1936, stated: "The central committees of both parties are unanimous in continuing to support the struggle of the Spanish people... and increasing aid. They welcome all acts of solidarity on the part of the international working-class movement... particularly the political, moral and material assistance rendered to the Spanish people by the Soviet Government and the peoples of the Soviet Union..."<sup>3</sup>

In September 1936 the Communist Party began sending groups

<sup>1</sup> After the Schutzbund was defeated in February 1934 and the Social-Democratic Party banned, illegal Social-Democratic organisations assumed the name of "Revolutionary Socialists".

<sup>2</sup> *Le volontaire de la Liberté*, March 17, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Presse Dienst der Roten Fahne*, December 3, 1936.

of volunteers to the International Brigades. Johann Koplenig undertook the organisation of this difficult task. The police and border guards were arresting anyone they found crossing the frontier whom they thought suspicious, and usually put them in concentration camps. Many volunteers made their way across the mountains into Switzerland disguised as mountaineers or skiers. Anti-fascists who were under police surveillance and had no passports had to be provided with forged papers. To reach Spain the Austrian volunteers were ready to make any material sacrifices and many of them sold their property to do so. For example, the young Tyrolese farmer Max Bair, whose story has been told by Egon Erwin Kisch, sold his cattle in order to obtain funds for himself and his friends for the journey to Spain.

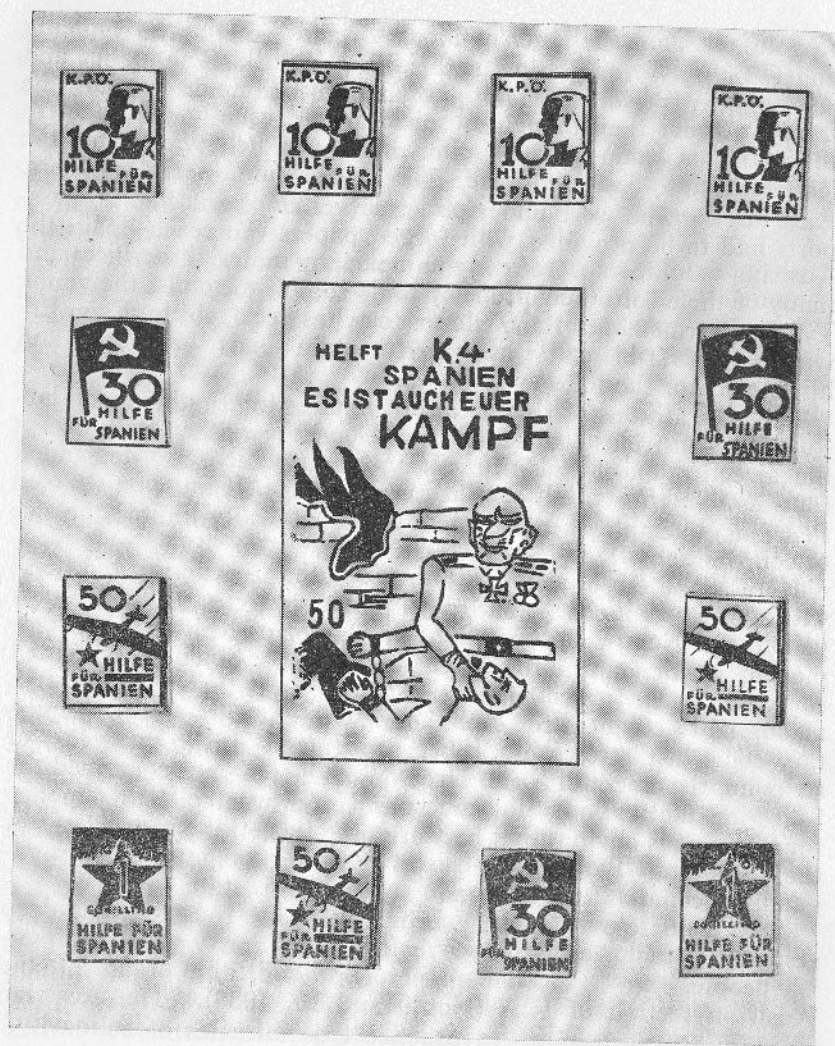
In the conditions of fascist terror the mass international solidarity of the Austrians could find expression in few other ways except illegal collection of funds for aid to Spain, which also demanded considerable efforts, self-sacrifice and courage. It must be stressed that mass unemployment and low wages naturally limited the size of contributions.

Here is one fact that shows how the authorities persecuted those who expressed their solidarity with the struggle of the Spanish people. On August 24, 1936, Thomas Hofer of Knittelfeld, unemployed, was denounced for collecting money for Spain. The accused confessed to having collected 2.6 schillings (at that time this sum amounted to payment for three hours' work at a low rate). A military court in the town of Leoben condemned him to two years of strict imprisonment "for state treason". The sentence contained the following motivation: "Inasmuch as Hofer was collecting money for Spain, it is obvious that he was doing this on the instructions of the Communist Party. Such collection is to be regarded as propaganda of communist ideas in Austria, which is state treason."<sup>1</sup>

"Not a single event since February 1934 has roused such a deep response at factories as the movement of solidarity with the Spanish people," wrote the newspaper *Tribunal*, the organ of the Austrian section of IRA (Nos 9 and 10, 1936). "The Austrian workers are performing in practice true miracles of solidarity." It gave the following example. At automobile and arms factories in Steier the workers had refused to collect funds for a squadron of the Austrian army and had taken a decision that everyone should contribute one schilling in aid of the Spanish Popular Front. The money was collected at almost all the factories in the district of Floridsdorf, Vienna, and also at all factories of the metal-working industry of the capital. The Vienna tram workers collected a considerable sum. In the district organisations of the Communist Party of Austria the collections were made under

<sup>1</sup> *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, October 18, 1936.





Specimens of postage stamps circulated illegally by the Austrian Communist Party as part of a campaign of aid to Republican Spain, 1936

the slogan: "Every district—one machine-gun for the Spanish Popular Front." Political prisoners in one of the Vienna prisons collected and smuggled out ten schillings for the Aid Spain Fund.

The government's answer was police persecution. On September 15, according to the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* of September 27, 1936, the police arrested for fund-collecting twelve trade-union officials and eighteen other workers at the Siemens-Schuckert factory in Enger-

thstrasse and at the cable factory in Leopoldau (a district of Vienna.—*Ed.*). The workers went on strike. The police surrounded these factories and made fresh arrests. The workers of the Austro-Fiat works then declared a two-hour solidarity strike and some of the arrested men were released. On October 4, 1936, the same newspaper reported arrests at the Shuttleworth works, at a Vienna milk-processing factory, at the main tram depot Vienna-Simmering, in Trauzl, at the railway in Floridsdorf and at the Alpine-Donawitz works. On November 2, twenty-eight tram workers were arrested in the Brigittenau district.

International solidarity, however, was not to be broken by police persecution. The constant explanatory work carried on by the underground working-class organisations kept up a high level of anti-fascist consciousness. There was not a single illegal central or local or factory newspaper that did not devote considerable space to reports about Spain, the solidarity movement and the letters of the Austrian volunteers. Even the harsh sentences passed by the Austrian courts could not stop the movement of solidarity. Here is an example of such a sentence, quoted from the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* of October 18, 1936: "A cabinet-maker's apprentice from Mürzzuschlag, Peter Draxler, has been sentenced in Leoben to five years' strict imprisonment for being in possession of a pamphlet against Franco. There was not a word about Austria in the pamphlet, it was written against Franco, Hitler and Mussolini! But this was enough to earn him a sentence of five years in gaol!"

Mention must also be made of the great help rendered by Austrian anti-fascists to the internationalists of other countries who were making their way across Austrian territory into Spain.

Even before the creation of the International Brigades Austrians were fighting the fascists on Spanish soil as part of the Thaelmann Centuria. One of them was the young Viennese Communist Franz Hrejsennou, who succeeded in reaching Spain in the first days of the Franco putsch; later he took part in the defence of Madrid, served in a ski reconnaissance detachment, then joined a tank crew and was killed in action at Brunete in the summer of 1937. The Viennese medical student Pepi Schneeweiss also fought in the same centuria and had been one of the first to set out for Spain at his own risk.

Later the volunteer anti-fascists started going to Spain in groups, usually through Paris, where their further transportation had for long been managed, on the instructions of the Communist Party of Austria, by the well-known Austrian writer Otto Heller (who afterwards died in a nazi concentration camp).

In October 1936 the first organised groups of anti-fascists from various countries, including Austria, began to reach Spain. One of them was Adolf Reiner (real name Anton Dobritzhofer), a Viennese mechanic, and former company commander of the Schut-





A group of Austrian volunteers of the Thaelmann Battalion, May 1937

zbund Karl Marx Regiment. In December 1936 he took part in the defence of Madrid as a machine-gunner, and during the operation on the River Ebro in the summer of 1938 commanded the 11th International Brigade in the rank of Major.

The first commander of the 11th International Brigade, General Kleber (Manfred Stern), who played a prominent part in organising the defence of Madrid in autumn 1936, was also born and brought up in Austria. From 1936 to 1938 Major Kurt (Josef Dycka) fought in Spain, having been one of the leaders of the illegal Schutzbund organisations in 1934 to 1935. During the Brunete offensive he was the chief of staff of the 35th Division; he was killed during the Second World War, fighting the Hitler troops in a Soviet partisan detachment.

Most of the Austrian volunteers in Spain fought in the Chapayev Battalion of the 13th International Brigade and in the 11th Brigade. They were particularly good machine-gunners. They were to be found in all arms of the services except the navy, and in every kind of unit. The former Schutzbund men, fighter pilots Hans Dobias and Walter Korous helped to defend Spain in the air; Major Walter Fischer was a doctor in the 11th and 15th brigades, and later in the 3rd Division. Major Fritz Jensen was at first brigade surgeon of the 13th Brigade, and later in command of the medical centre in Benicasim. Many Austrian doctors and nurses served in units of the Republican Army.

Major Adolf Fischer (Hugo Müller) commanded a battalion of machine-gunners of the 33rd Division; Laurenz Hiebl, a Spanish battalion of the 35th Division; Engineer Leopold Knopp, a battalion of the 14th Brigade; Major Fritz Tränkler, an engineer unit; Doctor Heinz Dürmayer, one of the commanders of the illegal Schutzbund, was commissar of a 15th Brigade unit; Captain Franz Willinger served in the 16th Corps; the former Schutzbund man, Rudolf Had was commander of the Thaelmann Battery; Franz Hirschmann, an instructor in the 3rd Division; Ferdinand Erb fought in the 122nd Brigade; Leopold Mallina was chief of staff of the 86th Brigade, which included an international battalion.

The Austrians made up the largest national group in the international armoured vehicle company. It was commanded by Linzer Sepp Mittermaier from Linz. Nearly twenty Austrian mountaineers commanded by Hias Hitzenberger fought in a guerrilla group in the Don Benito area, near the Portuguese frontier. The officers Toni Sandmann, the brothers Franz and Willy Etz and Alfred Ruzicka served in a light-tank regiment, in which Leo Dank (Hermann Neissl) was battalion commissar. In the booklet *The February Fighting*, published in Spain, Ruzicka wrote about one of the Austrians of the International Brigades: "Comrade Josef Kavka, whom we used to call Joschka, was 25 years old. He came from a family that had been working class for generations. For the last two years he had been serving in the Austrian army. He left for Spain in November 1936. On the 3rd anniversary of the heroic February fighting in Vienna he was killed defending the Spanish people and international democracy."

Other Austrian anti-fascists whose names are not mentioned here, fought valiantly in the International Brigades. Nearly 700 Austrian volunteers lie buried in the soil of Spain. Many of them who survived the fighting there later gave their lives in active struggle against the nazis or perished in Hitler's concentration camps.

On November 11, 1936, 625 internationalists arrived in Albacete. They were formed into the Chapayev Battalion which became part of the 13th Brigade. After a brief period of training the brigade was sent to the Teruel Front to take part in an offensive. Seven attacks and a 24-day defence of the positions captured—such were the first operations of the Chapayev Battalion, a baptism of fire for many of the Austrians, particularly the men of the machine-gun company. During the fighting the battalion's standard bearer was Franz Luda, of Vienna; he was badly wounded and had to have both legs amputated.

On February 13, 1937, after the fall of Malaga, the 13th Brigade was sent to reinforce the Southern Front. Doctor Fritz Jensen described the road to the front as follows: "The 180 kilometres from Almería to Adra were covered very slowly. The road was blocked with people: *milicianos*, old men and children. . . . Then we entered





Austrian volunteers of an armoured car company

Adra. The population were piling their belongings on to donkeys. Our first lorries drove in. . . . The men jumped out, formed up and started singing. . . . Everyone's spirits rose. Not only the population, but also the *milicianos*. We proposed that anyone who wanted to could join the Chapayev Battalion. More than 250 people responded. . . ."

From the end of February to the end of June 1937 the Chapayev Battalion fought in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada (at a height of 3,000 metres above sea level) at Valsequillo, La Granjela and (in terrible heat) at Peñarroya.

"The Chapayev Battalion occupied positions in the difficult terrain of the Sierra Nevada mountains," wrote Julius Schacht (Heinrich Fritz), the commissar of a machine-gun company. "Many of the Austrian comrades were accustomed to mountain country and this was a great help. . . ."

"One day at six in the morning a platoon commander and I set out to inspect machine-gun nests high in the mountains. We were mounted but only at noon did we spot the machine-gun crews. . . . They had no tents and we could only promise to try to obtain blankets, greatcoats and ponchos for the men in the nearby villages. A few days before they had endured a snowstorm. There were no shelters. Their clothes and blankets were wet through. . . . In these conditions the men had a whole week to wait before they would be relieved."

After four and a half arduous months in the front line the 13th Brigade was relieved, but instead of resting it was sent to the Central Front to take part in the offensive on Brunete. On July 7 the Chapayev Battalion participated in the assault on Villanueva de la Cañada. Later the 13th Brigade crossed the River Guadarrama and captured fascist positions on the heights of the eastern bank. During this operation it suffered heavy losses and was later reformed. The Austrian volunteers were put into the 4th Battalion of the 11th International Brigade.

Austrians fought in this brigade from the moment of its formation. One of them, Gustav Szindo who later became its commander, described two episodes of the battle for the Jarama in his book *The 11th Brigade*: "On February 15, 1937, the fascists attacked in the sector held by the Thaelmann Battalion. . . . Many of the men who were bringing up ammunition were wounded, others could not get through because the fascists had mounted a heavy fire curtain. A 24-year-old Austrian farmhand Johann Mayer then volunteered to deliver the ammunition. He managed to supply one machine-gun and two infantry companies with cartridges and hand grenades. . . . He saved the lives of many wounded comrades by carrying them off the field of battle. . . . The outcome of the engagement of February 15 depended on Mayer because on that day ammunition was the key factor. Johann Mayer fell in March of the same year in the fighting at Brihuega.

"Johann Mayer was the hero of February 15, and a few days later his fellow countryman Adolf Reiner (later brigade commander) also performed a feat of valour. During a fascist tank attack he crawled a distance of 100 metres with a rifle and armour-piercing bullets towards the advancing tanks and put two of them out of action. This created panic among the crews of the other tanks and they retreated."

At home the Austrian anti-fascists were supporting their fellow countrymen fighting on the Spanish fronts. The central committees of the Communist Party of Austria and the organisation of Revolutionary Socialists appealed to the Austrian people that, in honour of the anniversary of the February fighting in Austria, February should be made a month of collection of funds for the International Brigades.

After the Jarama the Austrians in the ranks of the 11th International Brigade fought against the motorised Italian divisions at Guadalajara, both in defence and in the counter-attack during which the Republican Army routed four Italian divisions. Later the Austrians took part in the fighting at Utande. In July 1937 they had a red-letter day: an Austrian battalion was formed as part of the 11th Brigade. This was not only an acknowledgement of the fighting services of the Austrian volunteers; it was also of great importance to the anti-fascist struggle in Austria.





Organisers of the 12th of February Battalion.  
Centre: Franz Honner

The Austrian fighters decided to name their battalion "The 12th of February, 1934". They all made a sacred vow to fight to the last drop of blood for freedom and independence of Republican Spain, realising that this would serve as a noble example for the liberation struggle of the Austrian people. A few days later the Republican troops launched an offensive against the fascists in the Brunete area. In this operation the Austrian battalion received its baptism of fire. Owing to lack of weapons, particularly machine-guns, it was

at first in the reserve, but when the attacking battalions were held up in front of Quijorna the 12th of February Battalion was ordered to join the offensive. After a successful third attack on a cemetery held by 600 Moroccans, more than 100 prisoners were taken along with many rifles and other trophies, including much needed ammunition. The division command officially thanked the fighters of the 11th Brigade who had liberated Quijorna and proved their worth in combat.

In August 1937 the 12th of February Battalion once again distinguished itself, this time on the Aragon front. In the assault on Quinto the Austrian volunteers captured a fascist artillery battery and won yet another message of thanks from the command. When the fascists made desperate efforts to relieve the garrison of Belchite which had been surrounded by Republican troops, the 12th of February Battalion and other units of the 11th Brigade blocked their path and beat off all attacks at Mediana.

Right up to the end of the war there was not a single major battle in which the 11th Brigade, and with it the 12th of February Battalion, did not take part. During the second operation at Teruel in January 1938 the battalion held out for weeks, repulsing the attacks of numerically superior fascist forces. On the sector held by

the Austrian volunteers the continuous fascist attacks were supported by tanks and aircraft, but the volunteers withdrew from their positions only after receiving orders from the superior command.

The battalion suffered heavy losses. During the assault on Quinto its commissar, Willi Soukup, a favourite with everybody, was killed. At Teruel the deputy commissar of the battalion, Communist Paul Zimmermann (Karl Kaspar), and many other comrades laid down their lives.

The battalion also fought valiantly during the enemy breakthrough on the Aragon Front and in the Levante. In March 1938 during the heavy rearguard actions of the retreating Eastern Front the Austrian brigadiers heard the sad news of the occupation of Austria by Nazi Germany. "All the more reason for us to fight against fascism and smash it here, in Spain,"—such was the reaction of the volunteers of the 12th of February Battalion.

Spaniards, Germans and men of other nationalities also fought in the 12th of February Battalion. It was commanded at various times not only by Austrians—Majors Karl Bauer, Emil Reuter, Franz Berger, Adolf Reiner and Captain Karl Rimbach—but also by Germans—Captain Harry Hellfeld and Major Willy Benz. Its other commissars were the Austrians Leo Wurzel (Lorenz Mraz) and Paul Steiner (Peter Hofer), the German Walter Knobloch and the Spaniard Vincente S. Bordes. A sound international fighting friendship grew up in the battalion.

In the middle of October 1937 a battalion meeting was held in a small village on the Aragon Front. Battalion Commissar Paul Steiner described it as follows: "We held our meeting by the walls of a church on a hill. Five hundred comrades of different nationalities stood shoulder to shoulder. . . . While a letter addressed home appealing for unity of the anti-fascist forces in Austria was being read out, it grew dark and we had to light candles. This gave the meeting even greater seriousness and solemnity. In answer to the question, who would vote for the letter, five hundred clenched fists went up. The letter was accepted unanimously. The Spanish comrades shouted, "Long live unity!" and the meeting ended with the singing of the *Internationale*. . . ."

When Hitler's army occupied Austria in March 1938, some of the anti-fascists succeeded in leaving the country. The flow of Austrians into the International Brigades once again increased. They included activists from the Communist Party. Fighting in the ranks of the Austrian battalion they took part in the last major offensive of the Republican Army on the Ebro.

Lieutenant Julius Schindler, the battalion adjutant, wrote in his memoirs: "On the night of July 24, 1938, the battalion crossed the river near the village of Vinebre and in the morning occupied the township of Ascó. From there it advanced on Fatarella, routing



isolated fascist groups on the way. On July 28 we attacked the Gandesa-Batea heights but without success. The next day Brigade Commander Otto Flatter (Ferenc Münnich) was wounded. He was replaced on August 12 by Major Adolf Reiner and the command of the battalion was taken over by a German, Major Willy Benz."

On the 17th and 18th of August the 12th of February Battalion attacked Height 481 in the Sierra Pandols five times. Though they failed to capture it, the brigade considerably improved its positions on the Tortosa-Gandesa road. Between September 7 and 23 at Height 565 the brigade beat off incessant attacks of the fascists, who were massively supported by artillery and tanks. On September 12 the Austrian battalion relieved the Thaelmann Battalion and held the front line from early morning to late at night under constant bombardment and repulsed all attacks.

On September 24 the 11th Brigade was withdrawn to the reserve. The 12th of February Battalion suffered heavy losses on the Ebro. It started the operation with 500 officers and men of various nationalities and ended it with only 122. Losses included the former editor of the newspaper *Rote Fahne*, Fabian (Rudi Auerhan), Schutzbund Lieutenant Franz Zartl, Captain Fritz Mitter from Upper Austria, Sergeant-Major Hans Wagner and Victor Lenhardt from Styria.

The withdrawal of the battalion from the front line coincided with the order issued by the Spanish Government to demobilise the internationalists in the Republican Army. It was very sad to part with the Spanish comrades. The Austrians, like the other international brigaders, were determined to continue the struggle against fascism. Brigade Commissar Ernst Blank wrote in the newspaper *Pasaremos*: "Yesterday I was in the 12th of February Battalion when our comrades gave their fraternal promise to fight as they had been fighting for the cause of Spain, for peace and the freedom of the peoples. Such a promise is no empty phrase for our people."

The demobilised Austrians from the 11th Brigade remained until January 1939 in a small township near the River Ter in Catalonia. They could not return home and not a single "democratic" country of the West was prepared to accept them. The Republic had recalled the internationalists from the front at a time when Hitler and Mussolini, in violation of their promises, were strengthening their troops operating in Spain. At the end of January the Italian motorised divisions with Franco's troops behind them approached Barcelona. Tens of thousands of women, children, old men and wounded crowded the roads leading to the French frontier.

On January 23, 1939, the demobilised brigaders again took up arms. They had to cover the retreat of the Republican troops. The

Austrians were commanded by Major Adolf Fischer. On January 24 fascist aircraft bombed the battalion's positions and on February 3 the last battle was fought against Italian troops at the town of Gerona. A group of 28 Austrians commanded by Lieutenant Hans Hertl defended the railway bridge over the Ter until it had to be blown up to prevent the Italian advance. On February 9, these 28 Austrians, having done their duty, crossed the French frontier near Port-Bou.

At the end of the Spanish war some of the international brigaders were given refuge by the Soviet Union, some of them succeeded in obtaining permission to enter Britain and the Scandinavian countries, but the majority remained in France and were later put into the concentration camps of St Cyprien, Gurs, Vernet and Argelès. Some of them escaped from these camps and lived illegally in France. In the camp at Gurs the 450 Austrians who remained there set up a school to improve their general and political education which was attended by 300 people.

The French authorities tried to get rid of the international brigaders and demanded that they should go either to North Africa or back to their own country, which had now become part of the "Third Reich". The Austrians were transferred to Argelès, where their barracks were surrounded by two companies of mobile guards. The members of the International Brigade were forced to go to Africa for the alleged purpose of building a railway, but in fact when they got there they were pressed into the Foreign Legion. The Austrians resisted and some of them were arrested.

After the fall of France the officers of the German armistice commission offered the Austrians repatriation with the assurance that they would not be persecuted on their return. The fighters of the 12th of February Battalion had no illusions on this score, but they wanted to continue the fight against Hitler in their own country and not be sent away to Africa. Faced with this choice, most of the internees in Argelès, and also some of the prisoners of the Vernet camp, decided with the consent of the leading organs of their parties to accept repatriation. Few, however, succeeded in retaining their freedom.

On May Day 1941 nearly all the repatriates entered the Dachau concentration camp. Even in the concentration camps they continued the fight against fascism. Thanks to their unity and high morale a relatively large number of fighters of the International Brigades succeeded in surviving the terrible conditions of their imprisonment. Of those who perished in this struggle mention must be made of the former Schutzbund battalion commander of Favoriten (a district of Vienna), Rudolf Friemel, who represented the Revolutionary Socialists in the 12th of February Battalion. The Gestapo arrested him in Auschwitz during an attempt to establish contact between the International Resistance Centre, of which



he was a member, and the Polish partisans. He was brutally tortured and hanged on December 30, 1944.

On the day of the liberation of Dachau the Austrian international brigaders Anton Hackle and Erich Hubmann (Lustig) were killed in a fighting with SS men. Sepp Plieseis, who had fought in a guerrilla detachment in Spain, succeeded on August 20, 1943, in escaping from a gang working outside the camp near the town of Hablein. In the Alt Aussee mountains he formed a guerrilla detachment, which gave the SS a great deal of trouble, and saved seven thousand unique paintings plundered by the nazis in various countries of Europe.

The Austrian international brigaders who reached the Soviet Union fought in the Red Army and in partisan detachments. Others displayed great courage in the struggle against the Hitler occupation forces as members of the French Resistance.

Communist Fritz Lettner of Salzburg, who was suffering from tuberculosis, was in a French hospital under police surveillance. In 1943 he and other prisoners escaped and got through to the French guerrillas. He fought with them till the liberation of France and returned home as an officer of the French Resistance forces.

Richard Sdolsek, who beginning with the defence of Madrid in 1936 took part in all the engagements of the 11th Brigade, escaped from a French camp and went underground for a time, then made his way to Vienna. The Gestapo did not know that he had taken part in the Spanish war. In 1943 he was called up for the Wehrmacht. With another comrade he escaped to the Italian guerrillas with whom he fought until the liberation of the Reggio Emilia province.

The Austrian emigre Communists and participants in the fighting in Spain took an active part in the French Resistance and showed no less heroism there than in armed guerrilla warfare. They brought out pamphlets and newspapers for the Austrians serving in the Wehrmacht and distributed them in the German garrisons of Paris, Bordeaux, Nancy, Lille and other cities. The anti-fascist newspapers *Soldat im Westen* and *Soldat im Mittelmeer*, which were aimed at the men in the German army, were also published by the Austrians. The first of them was founded by the Austrian international brigader Viktor Müllner (Hans Zipper), who was later murdered by the nazis in the Grossrosseln concentration camp. Austrian women, including nurses who had taken part in the fighting in Spain, helped to distribute illegal publications and arms for the guerrillas.

In 1943 the Austrians adopted a new method of underground struggle. Pretending to be French, they enlisted for work in the "Reich" as foreign workers, so that when they got to Austria they could organise resistance groups at factories and in towns and villages. This was done, for example, by two nurses, former partic-

ipants in the Spanish war, Mara (Frieda Ginsburg) and Anni Peczenig (her husband, a former volunteer, had been taken from the French camp and murdered in Auschwitz). These brave women were tracked down by the Gestapo and shot in the women's concentration camp of Ravensbrück.

The Austrian Freedom Battalions were of special significance in the ranks of the Yugoslav National-Liberation Army and the Styria fighting group, in which the former international brigaders played a leading part.

In the autumn of 1944 Franz Honner, one of the organisers of the 12th of February Battalion and several other comrades

parachuted from a Soviet aircraft over the frontier between Slovenia and Croatia. This group was joined by Resistance fighters and Austrians who had deserted from the Wehrmacht. Thus was formed the first Austrian Freedom Battalion. This battalion, which was engaged in heavy fighting right up to the unconditional surrender of Hitler Germany, had as its commanders and commissars former participants in the fighting in Spain—Max Bair, Romen Fuchsel, Leopold Stanzl and Franz Gebhart.

Towards the end of spring 1944 twenty-five parachutists landed in a liberated part of Slovenia. Of these fifteen were international brigaders, including eleven Austrians, two Spaniards and two Italians. One of the Spaniards was Américo Brizuela, commander of the 11th Brigade (after the recall of the internationalists from Spain). This unit, which called itself the Styria fighting group, conducted major military and propaganda operations. In the heavy fighting the group, which was often left to act on its own for weeks



The banner of the 11th International Brigade



on end and had to operate in any weather, suffered substantial losses. Of the Austrian international brigaders, Leo Engelmann and Karl Sattler (Prater) were killed, and the former signals chief of the 11th Brigade, Captain Sepp Spanner, was gravely wounded. But this fighting group achieved considerable success. Just before the end of the war it captured the town of Schwanberg in Southern Styria and by this time it had grown to five hundred strong.

At the beginning of January 1945 about twenty-five Austrian Communists made their way from France to liberated Belgrade, where out of former prisoners of war they formed the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Freedom battalions. They were commanded by the international brigaders Peter Hofer, Zalel Schwager, Max Goldberger and Laurenz Hiebl. Immediately after the German surrender the 2nd Battalion moved from the Croatian front to Vienna, where it arrived on May 12, 1945. Here it formed the nucleus of the new police force.

The former fighters in Spain did a lot for the restoration of the Austrian Republic. Many of them were in responsible positions in the Communist Party; fifteen former international brigaders were at various times, or still are, members of the Central Committee of the CPA.

The fate of the banner of the 11th Brigade, which was entrusted on April 17, 1938 to the 12th of February Battalion is worth recording. After the battalion resumed military operations in Spain in January 1939, the battalion's machine-gun company entrusted the banner to Ferdinand Barth, of Vienna. He wrapped it round his body and carried it safely under his uniform across the French frontier. In the St Cyprien camp he sewed it between two blankets. The banner then passed from camp to camp until Otto Glaser (Max Stern) "disappeared" with it for four weeks to conduct talks with the Austrian Party Committee in Toulouse. He returned without the banner, which had been left in the care of Mali Fritz, a Vienna-born woman. In the autumn of 1940, during a big terrorist sweep against the Austrian participants in the Resistance movement Mali was arrested, but she succeeded in taking the banner, sewed into a blanket, with her to a prison cell where she was kept with Gerta Schindel, a former worker for the Paris Aid Spain Committee. From there the banner went with them to a concentration camp in the Lozère department.

After her escape from the camp Gerta informed the comrades where the banner was. On Christmas Eve 1941, in a snowstorm, Mali passed the brigade's banner through the barbed wire to an Austrian participant in the Spanish fighting, Fritz Weiss. Meanwhile the Germans had occupied the whole of France and the banner of ten had to be moved to new hiding places. Finally it came to Paul Kessler in Lyons. In June 1944 he was arrested by the Gestapo but would not speak even under brutal torture. During

transfer to the Buchenwald concentration camp he escaped from the train. In October 1944 Kessler travelled to liberated Lyons to search for the banner. His flat had been ransacked but in one corner he found the cherished blanket—the Gestapo had never guessed what a treasure it concealed.

In January 1945 the Austrian international brigaders brought the banner with them to Yugoslavia and from there along with the Austrian Freedom Battalions it arrived in Vienna. Here the banner of the 11th Brigade is kept by the Communist Party of Austria as a fighting symbol of anti-fascism and the international solidarity of those who fought for the freedom of Spain.



## BRITAIN

When the military rebellion broke out in Spain in July 1936, there already existed in Britain a broadly-based organisation, the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism, which had done much to arouse public opinion, especially working-class opinion, to the dangers of fascism and war. Outstanding among this Committee's activities had been its holding in London of an international legal enquiry into the Reichstag Fire trial; its fight for the lives of Ernst Thaelmann, Edgar André and other German anti-fascists; the sending of a delegation to Brazil to intervene on behalf of Luis Carlos Prestes; and its actions in 1934 on behalf of the Asturian miners in Spain.

The existence and lively activity of the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism made it possible to move quickly in support of the Spanish people. On July 31, 1936, the Committee initiated a meeting which formed the Spanish Medical Aid Committee: the first British ambulance unit with its accompanying doctors, nurses and other medical personnel left Britain on August 10, less than four weeks after the start of the revolt. A stream of ambulances, medical supplies and personnel was sent by this committee right up to the end of the war.

Meanwhile the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism sent a delegation to Spain to investigate the role of German and Italian fascism, whose help to the insurgents was being denied by the Conservative British Government. The delegation, consisting of two Labour members of Parliament, one Labour member of the House of Lords and one Communist, brought back to England copious evidence in the form of German bombs, Italian parachutes and other captured equipment which was presented at the Labour Party's conference at Edinburgh in September 1936.

A wider committee was next formed, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. It consisted of representatives from every political party, from the trade-union movement, from various religious denominations and from existing committees. Its chairman

was the Conservative Duchess of Atholl, its joint secretaries a Labour, a Liberal and a Conservative member of Parliament. It is worthy of note that though the Conservative Government backed the insurgents throughout the whole period of the war, there was a substantial group of Conservatives who supported the campaign on behalf of the Spanish Republican Government, chiefly because of their recognition of the danger to Britain's imperial trade routes and national interest of a Spain in fascist hands.

It is also noteworthy that in the interests of the broadest possible unity of action, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief never asked its constituent members for a formal declaration of support for the Republican Government, agreement being founded on the proposal to send aid "where the need was greatest". Members of the Communist Party, always in a minority on local or national committees to aid Spain, adhered loyally to this agreement and did not press for the adoption of their full political programme with regard to Spain, for which they worked outside the broad "Aid Spain" movement. An outstanding contribution was made in this respect by Isabel Brown, a leading Communist whose powerful oratory and deep political understanding made her name nationally known and respected.

The broad united struggle on behalf of the Spanish people had its basis first and foremost among the organised workers, already alerted to the dangers of fascism by the growth of nazism, the destruction of the German working-class organisations, the fascist putsch in Austria and their own street battles against the fascist gangs of Oswald Mosley. They recognised the class character of the war in Spain, and saw with clear vision that the bombs which fell on Barcelona, Guernica and Málaga were a rehearsal for London, Clydebank and Coventry.

Along with the workers were the intellectuals, who saw the menace which fascism presented to their interests and to the whole fabric of European culture. Religious bodies recognised the fascist threat to religious freedom and were moved by their humanitarian beliefs to help the sufferers. Leading Labour politicians were urged forward by pressure from the rank-and-file of their party; Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party, was photographed on the terrace of the House of Commons giving the "Red Front" salute, and in December 1937 visited the British Battalion of the International Brigades, one of whose companies was named after him. Liberal politicians came forward to help in defence of bourgeois democracy. Conservatives in defence of British trading interests—a separate Committee of British Shipowners Trading to Spain was formed to combat the government's refusal to protect British shipping; these shipowners bought a whole page of advertising in the *London Times* to protest against the policy of "non-intervention".



Following the destruction of Guernica, when Mola threatened to "raze Bilbao to the ground", in May 1937 the British people opened their doors to 4,000 Basque children. A miracle of voluntary organisation transformed bare fields outside the port of Southampton into a well-equipped transit camp from which the children were sent to various homes organised to welcome them by trades councils, trade union branches, religious bodies and Basque children's committees where they were taught in their own language and enabled to cherish their own national culture, songs and dances as well as to grow up strong and healthy and free from fear. Over two thousand children returned to their homes and parents at the end of the war in Spain; many of the remainder have continued in Britain and now have families of their own.

The whole period of the Spanish struggle was marked by great public demonstrations, meetings and marches. Workers straight from their factories marched down Whitehall demanding "Arms for Spain!"—not once but many times. Traffic at London's central "hub", Piccadilly Circus, was held up by people demonstrating with the same demand. London print workers formed a permanent organisation—the Printers' Anti-Fascist Movement. Mass meetings were held in Trafalgar Square; thousands of meetings, great and small, took place up and down the country. Scarcely a town in Britain lacked an Aid Spain Committee; several cities sent their own ambulances, provided through local collections. Unemployed workers, of whom there were over two million in Britain at that time, gave from their meagre resources tins of milk, clothing and whatever they could spare.

In all, over £2 million worth of cash and goods were contributed to help the people of Spain. Convoys of food and medical supplies were driven across France and over the Pyrenees. Twenty-nine "foodships" sailed into ports of the Spanish Republic, not counting the commercial vessels which continued to trade with Republican Spain despite the fascist blockade: a notable figure in this traffic was the well-known Captain "Potato" Jones of Cardiff, who sailed time and again to Spain's northern ports.

Within a few hours of the arrival, in February 1939, of the first refugees from Catalonia across the Pyrenees into France, a British committee had set up its headquarters in Perpignan to bring them aid. In June 1939, the S.S. *Sinaia*, chartered by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, sailed for Mexico with 1,200 Spaniards aboard, whole families having been reunited with the help of the Perpignan committee. The British Committee for Refugees from Spain, formed after the end of the war to assist those Spaniards and international brigaders who succeeded in reaching England, remained in existence until the livelihood of every refugee was assured.

The movement of solidarity with the Spanish people was with-



An appeal for funds by Britain's National Joint Committee of Spanish Relief

out doubt the broadest and most widespread movement of international solidarity ever seen in Britain up to that time, uniting the most diverse sections of the whole population in support of the heroic fight of the Spanish people against fascism.

How, then, in face of this great campaign of solidarity and aid for Republican Spain, were the governments of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain able to pursue, from the beginning of the Spanish war to the end, a policy which ultimately ensured the military victory of Franco in Spain?

Bitterly anti-communist, the dominant section of the British ruling class was behind a policy of striving for agreement with the fascist dictators and of making concessions to them in the hope that the armed forces of Hitler Germany, in particular, would be launched towards the East in a "crusade" against the Soviet Union. That policy was given most shameful and dramatic expression in the Munich betrayal of Czechoslovakia, but it also ensured the equally infamous betrayal of the Spanish Republic. The second factor was the attitude of the Right-wing leadership of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, which prevented the mobilisation of a great united movement, led by the working class, of such strength that the reactionaries would have been compelled to give way before it.

From the very beginning of the Spanish war the rebel generals enjoyed the warm support of the reactionary forces in Britain and



a massive Conservative majority in Parliament. A person like the Duchess of Atholl, who was prepared to jeopardise a political career in the Conservative ranks in order to stand up for the Spanish Republic and principles of justice and decency, was a notable exception in the circles in which she moved.

While strangling the Spanish Republic with the noose of "non-intervention", the governments of Baldwin and Chamberlain pretended to be neutral. Some reactionary members of Parliament, however, disregarded the fig-leaf of "neutrality" and openly proclaimed their full support for Franco. Sir Henry Page Croft, for instance, said on March 23, 1938: "I recognise General Franco to be a gallant Christian gentleman, and I believe his word." Speaking at the same London meeting, Captain Victor Cazalet described General Franco as "the Leader of our cause today". "I hope to God Franco wins in Spain, and the sooner the better," exclaimed Sir Arnold Wilson.

Many, many other examples could be given of the deep devotion of many Conservative M.P.'s to that "gallant Christian gentleman" who drowned Spain in blood. Churchill referred to this warm sympathy for Franco among the wealthy and privileged in Britain when he wrote at the end of 1938: "Nothing has strengthened the Prime Minister's (Chamberlain's—*Ed.*) hold upon well-to-do society more remarkably than the belief that he is friendly to General Franco and the Nationalist cause in Spain."<sup>1</sup>

Sympathy for Franco—and for Hitler and Mussolini—went hand in hand with a fanatical hatred for the Soviet Union. Describing the instructions which he gave Foreign Secretary Eden shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish war, Baldwin said: "On no account, French or other, must he bring us into the fight on the side of the Russians."

For Baldwin (and for General Franco) the Spanish Republican Government, which consisted entirely of moderate bourgeois republican democrats, was Red, and the refusal of Manuel Azaña and Jose Giral to let fascism enslave the country was nothing but "Russian intrigues". The suppression of Spanish democracy was the only outcome of the Spanish war, acceptable to British ruling circles. They saw the non-intervention policy, serving as a disguise for their true aims, as the means towards achieving the desired outcome. The policy of bogus neutrality was "sold" to the British people with the big lie that it was a policy of peace, that the only alternative was a European war. With this argument of "peace in our time", Parliament and people were expected to swallow the intervention of Italy and Germany in Spain, the sinking of British merchant ships carrying goods and foodstuffs to Republican Spain, the growing threat to British communications in the Mediterra-

<sup>1</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Step by Step 1936-1939*, London, 1942, p. 304.

nean and the pro-Franco acts of the British Government which became increasingly shameless as the Spanish war approached its conclusion.

The official policy of encouraging fascism met with no resistance from the parliamentary opposition represented by the Labour Party.

The Right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress were more concerned with waging a battle against their own Left wing, and the Communist Party in particular, than with mobilising the people of Britain for militant action on behalf of the Spanish Republic. In fact the very idea of such action was abhorrent to them; moreover, they did their utmost to prevent anyone else from giving the leadership which they themselves refused to provide. On January 18, 1937, the Socialist League (consisting of Left-wing members of the Labour Party), the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party announced that they were going to launch a united campaign. On January 27, the Socialist League was expelled from the Labour Party.

There was a neat division of labour. The British Government brought pressure to bear on the French Government to ensure the continuation of the "non-intervention" policy, while Right-wing Labour leaders in Britain excused their own prolonged support for discredited "non-intervention" by pointing to the example of the French Government headed by the "tried Socialist" Léon Blum. Speaking at the 1936 Congress, Walter Citrine, then General Secretary of the TUC, tried to intimidate the delegates saying that a European war would break out if the munitions supplies needed by the Spanish Government were continued. This was a specious argument because Hitler Germany was not ready for war at the time. But it was appreciated by the Chamberlain Government, too.

Not until July 27, 1937, did the National Council of Labour (on which the Labour Party, the TUC and the Co-operative Movement were represented) finally dissociate itself officially from "non-intervention". But even after that the many proposals for industrial action of one kind or another—protest strikes, refusals to handle goods destined for the Franco zone, etc.—were rejected one and all by the Right-wing leadership as "impracticable".

What many members of the Labour Party thought of the policy which had been pursued by their Right-wing leaders, however, was made clear in their speeches at the Labour annual conference in May 1939. When discussing a resolution moved by the party leadership, in which they expressed their hypocritical "admiration for the heroism of the Spanish people" and censured the British Government for rendering aid to the insurgents, Delegate J. Poole told the conference: "Those of us who have been tied up with the Spanish struggle the last two and a half years cannot allow that the conscience of the Party shall be finally appeased, or that the



sacrifices of the Spanish people shall be written off in a resolution and a few complacent paragraphs of the Executive's report." Delegate Sybil Wingate spoke out even more strongly: "Lord Halifax has told us recently that this Government has no Spanish blood on its hands. . . . We know what to think of that Pontius Pilate, but what are we to say of ourselves, our own movement, of our National Executive who by their betrayal during the first terrible year, and their obstinate refusal to take any effective action worthy of the situation afterwards, have cost us the key position in the fight against fascism and sacrificed the lives of so many of our best and bravest comrades?"

The honour of the British labour movement was vindicated by the men and women who went to Spain to fight alongside their heroic Spanish brothers and sisters.

Eighty per cent of the 2,000 British volunteers came from the working class; the majority of them were Communists and members of the Labour Party.

The first British life to be given on behalf of Spanish freedom was that of Felicia Browne, a young woman artist. Felicia Browne was in Barcelona when the revolt broke out; she had travelled there to attend the People's Olympiad, and immediately enrolled in the militia. She was shot on August 25, 1936, while rescuing a wounded comrade, Paolo Comida, after her patrol, engaged in a night operation on the Aragon Front, had been attacked and outnumbered by the enemy.

First move to organise a group of British volunteers was initiated by Sam Masters and Nat Cohen, two young London clothing workers, who were on a cycling holiday in France at the time of the revolt and at once crossed the frontier into Spain. In Barcelona they founded the Tom Mann Centuria from among the handful of British volunteers who had begun to arrive. When news came of the gathering of all the international volunteers at Albacete this group, now numbering 18 men, went to the newly-formed base and were attached to the Thaelmann Battalion. A dozen other Britishers who had by this time reached Albacete formed a machine-gun group and were enrolled in the French Battalion. Both these groups took part in the defence of Madrid.

Meanwhile in Britain the call had gone out for the formation of a British Battalion, and hundreds of volunteers had come forward. A tremendous lead in this campaign was given by Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party. Recruiting was carried on more or less openly until, on January 9, 1937, the British Government decided to make the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 applicable to Spain, and threatened those guilty of an offence under this Act with imprisonment up to two years or a fine, or both. Still more difficulties were encountered when the Non-Intervention Committee on February 20 enforced its ban on volun-

teers and announced a system of control. But these obstacles only made the British anti-fascists more determined. A weekend ticket to Paris permitted exit from Britain and into France without a passport. They set out as "tourists", went to Paris and then, with the magnificent help of the French comrades, crossed the Pyrenees on foot or made the journey by sea, sometimes in small open boats.

During November and December 1936, nearly 500 British volunteers arrived at Madrigueras near Albacete, an assembly point for other English-speaking volunteers—Irishmen, Canadians, Cubans, Cypriots, etc. It must be remembered that Britain at that time did not have compulsory military service; only a small proportion of the volunteers (mostly veterans from the First World War) had had any military training or experience, and they were needed to help in the training of the younger men.

In late December the command of the Republican Army ordered the Albacete base to form a new International Brigade to be sent to the Southern Front. It was to check the insurgents' offensive in the Cordoba-Andújar sector. The new, 14th Brigade was formed in a matter of few days. The first to be sent to the front, on December 24, 1936, was the Marseillaise Battalion with a 145-strong company composed largely of British volunteers. Commander of the company was Captain George Nathan, a retired British Army officer; its political commissar was the Communist Ralph Fox, author, journalist and historian. The 14th Brigade, together with the Spanish units, fulfilled the task of checking the fascist breakthrough. But it lost many of its fighters. Ralph Fox lost his life in the battle for Lopera. This battle was the last for the gallant brigadiers Lorrimer Birch, scientist and Oxford University graduate; John Cornford, Cambridge University graduate, Communist student leader and a poet of considerable promise; Joe Gough, unemployed worker from Luton; "Tich", formerly a sergeant in the British Army; McLaurin, a native of New Zealand who had come to Spain from England, and many others.

After nearly one month's fighting the company—by this time only 67 strong—returned to Madrigueras, where the work of training and organising the new recruits was going on steadily.

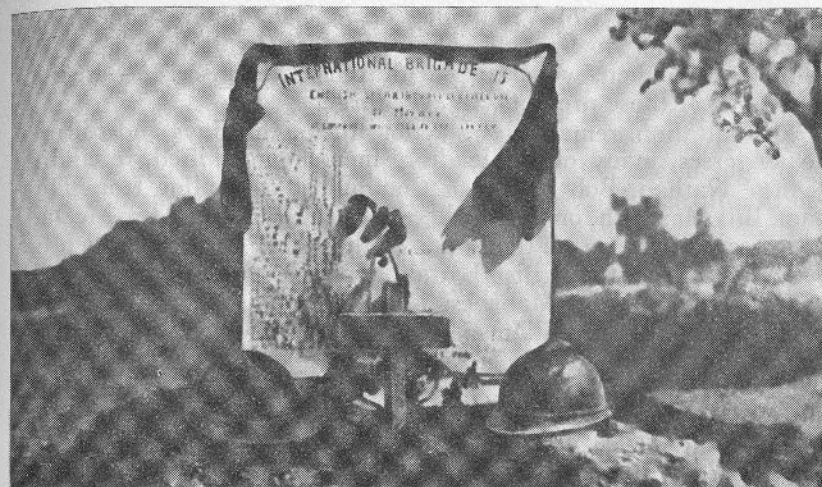
By the end of January 1937 the British Battalion, six hundred strong and composed of four companies with auxiliary units, was organised and ready. The leading part in its organisation was played by D. F. Springhall, who became battalion commissar, and Peter Kerrigan, who later took his place. It was incorporated into the newly-formed 15th Brigade along with the Franco-Belgian, Dimitrov and American battalions. The 15th Brigade went into battle on the Jarama in February.

On the 12th, 13th and 14th of February, 1937, the British Battalion underwent its "baptism of fire", in position between two of



the advancing fascist columns (Moroccans and the Foreign Legion mercenaries) who were the spearhead of the attack. By the morning of the second day its numbers had been reduced to 225. During the first half of that day it repelled a fascist attempt to advance. Later the Moroccans broke through on the battalion's right flank and the entire machine-gun company was captured. Shortly afterwards the battalion commander, Tom Wintringham, was carried off with a wound in his thigh. The men stuck tenaciously to the sunken road which was now their front line. On the morning of the 14th they were still there, tired, hungry, but undaunted. Commanded now by the Scotsman Jock Cunningham, who had "escaped" from hospital, they prepared to attack, but were surprised by enemy tanks followed by Moroccans. Without anti-tank guns or hand-grenades, small groups continued to fight on, but soon the tanks were on the road and the Republican line began to retreat. But then the retreating troops rallied. With Cunningham at their head, the 140 British survivors marched back to their positions. The line was held again. By nightfall the men who had been routed a few hours before settled down on the ground they had recaptured. In subsequent days the British beat back a series of minor attacks, and went into action again on February 27, when the Republican forces, attacking along the entire front, finally brought the battle to a close. The Jarama battle took heavy toll among the British Battalion and particularly among its leadership. On the first day, the battalion lost two-thirds of its political and military commanders, and the next day practically the remainder. New leadership sprang from the rank and file to replace the fallen and the wounded. Company Commander Briskey was one of the many competent and modest leaders of the British working class. Under his guidance, his company held a practically untenable position throughout February 12. He died as he wished to die, in action with his men. Ken Stalker, assuming command of a company in the thick of battle and disdaining to retreat, died at his post. Clem Beckett, famous in England as a "dirt-track" rider, was one of a group which held out for hours against superior forces. He and C. St. John Sprigg (the Marxist writer Christopher Caudwell) died side by side.

In those first days there fell too, Jim Wash from Birkenhead, Leonard Bibby from Liverpool and Clifford Lawther from Durham. George Bright was killed as he was bringing up much-needed ammunition. Outstanding among the British comrades was Londoner Ralph Campeau, political commissar of No. 1 Company, whose organising ability and comradeship marked him as a leader among men. On February 12, in the thick of battle, his voice could be heard singing the "Young Guardsman" as he rallied and steadied the men. Severely wounded by machine-gun fire, he died some days later. M. Davidovitch of London, leader of the first-aid



A grave of British volunteers killed in action near the River Jarama in February 1937

section showed great bravery throughout the terrible day of February 12. Up and down, across bullet-swept slopes, he and his men carried the wounded. He escaped death a hundred times until in the late afternoon, when running to help another wounded man, he was himself fatally wounded. As he lay dying he told those who came to succour him to leave him there and attend to men whose lives might be saved.

In March the battalion, together with the whole of the 15th Brigade, settled down to trench life, which continued until June 17, when it said goodbye to the Jarama and was then under marching orders for the great offensive at Brunete.

Meanwhile, in March, a group consisting of new British recruits and some men who had recovered from wounds received at Cordoba and Madrid were enrolled in the 20th Battalion of the 86th mixed Spanish Brigade to take part in the defence of Pozoblanco. Led by the Irish Lieutenant Paddy O'Daire, the British and Irish, some 40 in all, formed No. 1 Section of the Anglo-American company. After nearly four months on the Southern Front, this company returned to Albacete for the purpose of joining the 15th Brigade.

Between July 9 and 18, the British Battalion was in the thick of the fighting at Brunete. Major George Nathan was chief of operations, Jock Cunningham was in command of three of the six battalions of the 15th Brigade, and the British Battalion was led by Fred Copeman. On July 6 the British Battalion was ordered to



approach the town of Villanueva de la Cañada, in order to cut the road leading to Brunete. There the fascists attempted a sortie using civilian men, women and children as their screen—an incident none of those present will ever forget.

The battalion remained in action for eight days and suffered heavy losses, many of its leading men being killed, including George Nathan, Bob Elliott, a Communist councillor from Durham, Bill Meredith, one of the heroes of the Jarama, Alex McDade of Glasgow (who wrote the words of the song "Jarama" which became the song of the British Battalion), and George Brown, a leading Communist from Manchester. Both Fred Copeman, the commander, and Bert Williams, the commissar, were compelled to leave the front line due to sickness; their places were taken by Joe Hinks and Walter Tapsell. The commander of the newly-formed anti-tank battery, Malcolm Dunbar, was wounded and his place was taken by Hugh Slater.

Slater (in *The Book of the 15th Brigade*) described an incident on the third day of the Brunete offensive in these terms: "...Malcolm Dunbar and I were walking back from our most forward gun, over one of the undulations in the hills. We saw that our base was being violently bombarded. Some cases of ammunition were exploding in howling syncopation with the screaming of the enemy shells. The grass all round the guns and Cunningham's dugout was on fire. The whole area was a private little inferno. ... Behind the smoke, moving about, we could see four or five grey, ghost-like forms. It was hardly believable that there could be men out in the open in the middle of crashing shells. ... The members of the battery had been beating out the blazing grass with blankets. They had by their really magnificent nerve prevented further supplies of shells, and even the guns themselves, from being destroyed. The members of our anti-tank battery who were concerned in this splendidly courageous incident were Arthur Nicholl of Dundee, Geoffrey Mildwater of Finchley, Otto Estensen of Ormesby, Jimmy Arthur of Edinburgh, Jack Black of Dover, and Cooperman of the Brigade Staff. Black, our second-in-command, was killed after he had made two journeys to the ammunition-dump, pulling out cases. ... This is simply one of the innumerable heroic actions which happened during those days. ..."

On July 22, the British were ordered to hold a key position at the end of the line which ran south from Villafranca at the point where it turned west towards Brunete. After two days they were ordered to retire to defensive positions, but the order did not reach them for several hours, and they were in danger of being cut off. In the later afternoon, with only 42 men remaining out of the original 300, they advanced again and occupied a new position. The following day the fascists made several attempts to advance but were repulsed by the American Battalion. Only by July 26 had

the enemy's counter-attack spent itself. The 15th Brigade was moved into a reserve position.

After a few weeks' rest in the village of Mondejar, the British Battalion, now under command of Paddy O'Daire with Arthur Ollerenshaw, a former pilot in the Royal Air Force as his adjutant, took part in the capture of Quinto and Belchite, being given the task of defending Mediana, ten miles north of Belchite, in order to hold back a fascist force marching to the relief of the besieged town. When Belchite fell, the British Battalion went into reserve for a period, after being assured by General Walter (Karol Swierczewski), in command of the 35th Division, that "in these operations the British Battalion fully justified its role and maintained the traditions of worthy and often outstanding effort which it has established in Spain". Proudly inscribed in the records of the 15th Brigade is a copy of the telegram sent by the Commander of the Army of the East to General Walter:

"I send my most enthusiastic congratulations to all the commanders, officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of that brave Division, and especially to yourself and the 11th and 15th brigades for the heroism and fighting spirit shown in brilliant action of the taking of Quinto ... an episode of great importance for the triumph of our cause."

In October, the British Battalion moved back to the lines facing Fuentes del Ebro, where all battalions of the 15th Brigade were engaged, the major role in this operation being played by the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and a tank task force of the Spanish Battalion. The British suffered the loss of their commander, Harold Fry, and their commissar, Eric Whaley, fresh from England.

The 15th Brigade at the end of October went back to a group of villages near Madrid for reorganisation and renewed military and political training. In November, the battalion received from Britain a richly-embroidered banner, which was presented at a special parade attended by the commander of the 15th Brigade and the Mayor of Mondejar. Before Christmas came, two visitors had brought immense encouragement and stimulus to the British lads: Arthur Horner, later to become General Secretary of the Welsh Miners and of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party, who visited not only the British Battalion but every hospital and convalescent home where his compatriots were lying.

Teruel was taken by Spanish troops on December 22, 1937. In the first days of January 1938, the British Battalion, commanded by Bill Alexander, with Walter Tapsell as political commissar, began a period of service which was to last three months, mark-



ing some of its best and most heroic actions but costing the lives of some 200 valiant comrades.

Half way through January the Brigade Headquarters was moved out from a railway-arch a few kilometres north-east of Teruel and established in the town itself. The four battalions moved into position facing the expected fascist counter-attack. This began on the morning of January 19. The Spanish, Canadian and British comrades smashed the fascist attempt to advance down the valley leading directly into Teruel. On the evening of January 20, the commander of the 5th Army Corps, Juan Modesto, specially commended the British Battalion on its stand, and its commander, Bill Alexander, was promoted on the field to the rank of captain.

In February the British Battalion was again in action, this time in the vicinity of Segura de los Baños. "The 15th Brigade again stole the day. . . . We took prisoner a whole company with its commander, a captain; captured nine machine-guns, three mortars and more than a hundred rifles. On the following day, February 16, the 15th Brigade inflicted heavy losses on the two fresh counter-attacking enemy battalions,"<sup>1</sup> wrote General Walter, commander of the 35th Division. Here the battalion successfully routed superior fascist forces and was again commended by General Walter. Casualties in this action were somewhat lighter than before; this can perhaps be attributed to the increased military efficiency and battle-training of the battalion. But Bill Alexander was wounded and became so seriously ill that he was finally invalided back to England in July. Sam Wild, who had formerly served in the Royal Navy, became commander of the battalion.

March and April of 1938 were the days of trial for the British Battalion and the entire 15th Brigade; the fascists had succeeded in breaking the Aragon Front, and the Republican troops were retreating in disorder. As soon as the first reports on the enemy offensive were received, the 15th Brigade was ordered by the divisional command to move to the front line. But it was not yet known that the front line had been left behind by the retreating Republican troops.

Marching towards Belchite in the early hours of March 10, the British Battalion entered an olive grove some two kilometres north of the town, where they found themselves in the immediate vicinity of the enemy. Subjected to heavy machine-gun and artillery fire, the battalion held on until they were literally blasted out. Sam Wild ordered each company to march down the road and take up positions for covering the retreat. During their retreat through the "dead" town, the British took up positions five times and combated the enemy. The last of the Republican forces to leave

the town were 90 Britishers who kept up a brilliant resistance to the last moment and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy.

On March 11, still withdrawing, the battalion found itself almost encircled, but after a night's forced marching, it broke out and reached the Brigade Headquarters at Vinaceite. The British reached Caspe on March 15 and fought a heavy rearguard action there in the course of which, due to the infiltrating tactics of the enemy and the difficulty of telling friend from foe, Battalion Commander Sam Wild and three others were captured—but smashed their way through their captors, one of the four using a tin of corned beef as a club!—and escaped. The commander received orders to occupy a new position on the fringe of the town and did so, but during the night the position was encircled and the British had to retire again. They retired through Caspe, taking up every position into which they were ordered and holding it until ordered to move. For this work Sam Wild was promoted to the rank of captain.

On March 31, 1938, the British Battalion, marching through Calaceite on its way to the front, marched into an enemy ambush. A fierce struggle ensued in which they put several enemy tanks out of action. But 140 men were taken prisoner that morning. Among those captured was the popular commissar of the battalion, Walter Tapsell, who later was shot by the fascists.

After the next 24-hour fighting, during which a further 150 men were killed and wounded, the battalion was regrouped under Captain Malcolm Dunbar, and Bob Cooney as commissar. Crossing mountainous country under heavy fire, they took up position on the high ground commanding the two roads to Tortosa and Mora del Ebro. For twelve hours they prevented a large fascist column from moving down the road, giving the Republican forces time to blow up the bridge across the Ebro. By nightfall their position had become untenable, and the following morning they crossed the river in small boats and rejoined the main body of their division.

During the next eight weeks, while the enemy was concentrating on Valencia, the Ebro Front was quieter. The time was spent in regrouping, reorganising and preparing for the crossing of the Ebro. It was at this time that Pandit Nehru and Krishna Menon visited the battalion.

At midnight on July 25, the battalion received its long-awaited orders for the crossing of the Ebro.

The 15th Brigade crossed at Mora del Ebro; the first of its battalions to cross was the Canadian. But they had been preceded by Spanish troops from other brigades which had mopped up all resistance. The British followed the Canadians, some in boats and some on the first pontoon bridge. They advanced quickly in the direction of Corbera and by late afternoon were outside the town

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Archives*, No. 2, 1962, p. 175 (in Russian).



and attacking the hills on the left, which were occupied by Moroccans. In an all-night battle the Moroccans were driven off and the Dabrowski Brigade was able to advance and occupy Corbera.

It was in the fight against the hill protecting Gandesa that the British fought their toughest action in this campaign and won the title of "shock battalion". This high fortified hill, known as Hill 481, resisted all attacks. Collaborating on different occasions with their Canadian and American comrades and with the Spanish units of the 5th Corps the British and Irish attacked the hill for five successive days. On August 1, they flung themselves into the final and most furious assault, which lasted twelve continuous hours. At one time the leading men were within 20 metres from the fascist positions, but were driven back by fire from three directions—from the hilltop, from Gandesa and from a valley on their right flank. At 10 o'clock that night they were ordered to stop, though they were preparing—and prepared—for yet another attempt.

On the night of August 6, after thirteen days' continuous action, the battalion went into reserve. After eight days it went back into the line and fought in the defence of the famous Hill 666 in the Sierra Pandols. It was here that Battalion Commander Sam Wild was wounded in the hand. He refused to leave the line. For his leadership in the Ebro battle he was awarded the Medal of Valour and, before his departure from Spain, was raised to the rank of major.

On August 26 the battalion went into rest, but was back in the line on September 6, acting as shock troops wherever necessary. On September 22 the 15th Brigade was ordered to relieve the 13th Brigade and move into action. By this time it was known that the Republican Government had decided to withdraw the International Brigades. The battalion's last fight on the Ebro was as fierce as its first fight on the Jarama in February 1937.

On September 23, they crossed the Ebro once more—to take leave of their comrades of the Republican Army and prepare for their return to England. Their ranks were sadly depleted. Harry Dobson, Lewis Clive, David Guest, Morris Miller, Jack Nalty, Liam McGregor—all commanders or commissars, were among those who had fallen in the last battle. British volunteers were returning home having trained many young Spanish fighters to take their place. The British Battalion, like other international units, had long been replenished by Spanish fighters, and the 15th Brigade was lately commanded by a Spaniard.

War was not over for all of the volunteers. British medical personnel continued to save the lives of the wounded and convalescing Republicans. Several of the medical volunteers remained with their patients during the retreat from Catalonia into France and continued to care for them in the French camps. Eleven doctors and 29

nurses, with some 35 ambulance drivers, administrative workers and other personnel, took part in the Spanish war alongside the British volunteers. One doctor, Sollenberger, was killed at Brunete. The British medical personnel served on all fronts, and British funds were contributed to the upkeep of two base hospitals, at Huete and Uclés, and one convalescent hospital at Valdeganga.

Dr R.S. Saxton continued the work begun by the Canadian Dr Norman Bethune, and his mobile blood-transfusion service played an important part in the Ebro campaign. Dr L. Crome became divisional medical officer of the 35th Division. The British nurses were highly-esteemed for their excellent training, their courage and devotion to duty. Among the medical and other personnel sent to Spain was a group of highly-skilled motor-mechanics led by Harry Evans whose superb work in repairing and refitting damaged ambulances and other vehicles was of tremendous help.

British volunteers took part in the unforgettable farewell parade in Barcelona. Owing to difficulties caused by the hostile attitude of the British and French governments, the British Battalion did not arrive back in London until December 7, 1938. They were received at Victoria Station by a vast crowd which completely dislocated the traffic and broke through the police cordons which were attempting to control the situation. After welcoming speeches from Clement Attlee, Sir Stafford Cripps, Tom Mann, the trade-union leader, William Gallacher, Communist member of Parliament and the President of the Mineworkers' Federation, Will Lawther (whose brother had been killed in Spain), Sam Wild replied in these words:

"We intend to keep the promise we made to the Spanish people before we left—that we would change our front but continue to fight in England for the assistance of Spain."

The International Brigade Association was formed immediately after the return of the British Battalion to England and has remained in active existence ever since. It did not have to undertake the task of caring for the disabled fighters or the families of the fallen, because this task had already been undertaken by the Dependents' Aid Committee of the International Brigade, formed in June 1937, which raised well over £50,000 to meet these needs.

The Association entered the political struggle for continued support to the Spanish Republic, its members going on speaking tours throughout the country to enlist further aid and support for Spain. It also began to raise funds and to campaign on behalf of the less fortunate comrades-in-arms of the International Brigades who could not return to their homes—those in the camps of southern France and those still in prison in Spain.

After the outbreak of the Second World War the Association conducted a vigorous campaign on behalf of those international volunteers who were in prisons and concentration camps in France





Welcoming British volunteers of the International Brigades at London's Victoria Station, 1938

and North Africa; a highlight of this campaign was the collection of hundreds of signatures of notable people on behalf of Franz Dahlem, Heinrich Rau and Luigi Longo after the German occupation of France. The Association also called a conference of exiled governments in London to urge these governments to demand the release of their nationals from Spanish prisons and camps and allow them to proceed to England to take part in the war against fascism.

The great majority of the British volunteers entered the armed forces—though some, because of prejudice in high places, were refused and many were denied promotion. A number of outstanding anti-fascist fighters gave their lives in this continuation of the struggle.

The Association itself published a monthly journal, first called *The Volunteer for Liberty* and later *Spain Today* which continued to give news of the struggle of the Spanish people and to rally support for it for fifteen unbroken years until it was compelled by rapidly rising printing costs to stop publication. The Association never ceased to campaign on behalf of the Spanish people and their Republican leaders, rallying great support on behalf of such noted figures as Santiago Alvarez, Sebastian Zapiain, and Gregorio Lopez Raimundo, and raising large sums of money to send British lawyers to attend trials of Spanish political prisoners;

tribute has been paid over and over again to the effectiveness of these campaigns and to the presence of British legal observers at Franco trials—though in some lamentable instances such as the trial of Julian Grimau, the protest and the presence of international lawyers were not sufficient to prevent disaster.

Basing itself always in the British trade-union and labour movement, the Association has continued, and still continues, to rally support for the Spanish people's struggle for freedom. Under its four successive secretaries, Bill Rowe, Jack Brent, Alec Digges and Nan Green, it has won and kept its high standing among the British working class and people. It has issued thousands of pamphlets and leaflets, protest cards and posters; to this day scarcely a week goes past without its members going out to address meetings of trade-union branches, youth groups and other organisations. It has held great public rallies and demonstrations. Every leading representative of the Franco regime visiting England—Castiella, Fraga Iribarne and so on—has been met by demonstrations of workers and trade unionists carrying banners and shouting slogans on behalf of Spanish democracy and against Franco and his regime.

Former British volunteers have won leading positions in many trade-union organisations, notable among these being Will Paynter of the National Union of Mineworkers and J. L. Jones of the Transport & General Workers' Union, both highly respected national figures.

The Association's activity has helped to keep fresh in people's minds the memories of the heroic anti-fascist struggle of the Spanish people in the thirties.

Today solidarity with the Spanish people and support for their struggle against the Franco regime remains, as in the thirties, part of the peace movement of the working class and progressives in Britain.



## BULGARIA

In the years 1936 to 1939, when the great fight of democracy against fascism was being waged in Spain, the Bulgarian people were being held down by a monarchical fascist dictatorship. The Communist Party had gone underground back in 1923. After the military fascist coup d'état of May 19, 1934, all political parties had been banned. By means of fascist terror and social demagoguery a handful of big capitalists and bankers under the aegis of the monarchy had the power firmly in their hands. The anti-national foreign policy of the ruling clique drove Bulgaria into the embraces of the Hitlerite aggressors. But Bulgarian fascism, unlike German, was incapable of gaining wide support among the masses. The revolutionary traditions of the armed uprisings of 1918 and 1923 were still strong among the people. Mass sympathy was on the side of the forces opposing fascism.

The most active of these forces was the Bulgarian Communist Party which, although operating illegally, had a powerful influence in town and country. The Bulgarian Popular Agricultural Union (BPAU), the mass peasant party, also played a big part in the struggle against the monarcho-fascist government. The opposition included also the petty-bourgeois political organisation Zveno (Link), which had considerable influence among military circles and the democratic-minded intelligentsia, the Social-Democratic, democratic and radical parties, and other political groupings. The Communist Party made every effort to build up a Popular Front uniting all the country's anti-fascist forces for the overthrow of the monarcho-fascist regime. An intense struggle between democracy and fascist reaction was developing in Bulgaria.

Naturally enough, the events in Spain, where this struggle had flared up into civil war roused a widespread response among Bulgarians. The attitude of the political parties and the masses to these events diverged sharply from the position of official circles. The government of Georgy Kyosevianov joined the "non-inter-

vention" agreement and declared a position of neutrality in relation to the belligerents—Republicans and Francoists. In practice it did everything it could to support the insurgents and undermine the interests of the legal Spanish Government. In August 1936 the Bulgarian Government not only prohibited the export and transit of arms to Spain but also virtually stopped all trade with the Spanish Republic. On April 9, 1937, it published the Decree on Non-Participation of Bulgarian Subjects in the Spanish Civil War. This created a barrier only for the departure of anti-fascist volunteers because hardly anyone wanted to fight on the side of Franco.

Although Bulgaria still had official diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic, the Bulgarian Government allowed a representative of the Spanish insurgents to stay in Sofia and granted him freedom of action, while interfering with the normal work of the Spanish Republic's mission in a variety of ways.

The government censorship restricted publication of truthful information on the events in Spain, while the yellow pro-fascist press, using all the tricks of corrupt bourgeois journalism, tried to smear the government of the Popular Front. It was particularly zealous in denigrating the idea of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, and also in arguing that the Republicans' struggle against the insurgents had no real backing and was therefore hopeless. Slandorously accusing the USSR of one-sided intervention in internal Spanish affairs and intimidating the ordinary public with talk of a military threat, the reactionary papers pumped the idea that all resistance to German-Italian intervention in Spain would lead to war in Europe.

The semi-official newspaper *Dnes* (Today), organ of the fascist Popular Social Movement, the paper *Slovo* (Word) and other similar publications conducted a frantic campaign against the Spanish Popular Front and praised Franco to the skies. For them the insurgents were "courageous", "patriotic" Spaniards rebelling against the "regime of terror", against "unprecedented violation of individual freedom and private property".

The attacks on the Spanish Republic came not only from the right but also from the "left", from numerically small groups of Bulgarian anarchists, and also Trotskyites who called for a "proletarian revolution" against the government of the Popular Front.

In contrast to these forces that were hostile to the Spanish people, the overwhelming majority of the democratic public and bourgeois anti-fascist opposition, despite differences of opinion and some wavering (particularly over the question of non-intervention), was in sympathy with the Spanish Republic and the cause that it was defending.

The consistent defender of the Spanish people was the vanguard of the working class—the Communists. They were joined by



the Left-wing Socialists, the Left-wing majority of the Agricultural Union and members of the Zveno organisation.

The Communist Party launched a big propaganda campaign in defence of the Spanish Republic, published illegal newspapers and leaflets. It also used the pages of the legal democratic papers and magazines (for example, the weekly *Zarya* (Dawn), *Stranitsy* (Pages) and *Globus* (Globe) which continued to appear despite the strict censorship and frequent government bans. The Communists also brought a large quantity of progressive literature from abroad that gave an objective account of the situation in Spain. The Soviet and Spanish broadcasts in Bulgarian were an effective form of propaganda in defence of the Spanish people.

The communist and democratic press exposed the insurgents as being directly responsible for the civil war and stressed the terroristic nature of Spanish fascism. "The medieval Spanish Inquisition pales in comparison with the white terror sweeping through the provinces captured by the insurgents", stated the leaflet *Spain in the Struggle Against Fascism* that was illegally distributed by the Communists. "In Spain people are fighting against wild beasts," wrote the newspaper *Zashchita* (Defence), the illegal organ of IRA in Bulgaria, on June 15, 1937. These papers reported the heroic exploits of the Spanish anti-fascists and expressed admiration for their selfless struggle.

The revolutionary poet Nikola Vaptsarov devoted to the heroism of the Spanish people several of his poems—"Spain", "Dream", "Song to a Comrade", "Song to Wife" and "Letter"—considered by progressive literary critics to be some of the best and most impressive works on this subject in world poetry.

The courage of the defenders of Madrid was hailed by the writer Svetoslav Minkov in his book *Madrid Is Burning*. "These people," he wrote "deserve all admiration, and their great feat—our profound respect."<sup>1</sup> The same feeling (although in a more veiled form because of the harsher censorship) was expressed by the poet Mladen Isayev in his book *The Unquiet Planet*, published in 1937.

In her articles *What I Saw in Spain* the writer Maria Grubeshliyeva had high praise for the valour of the Spanish people, particularly the people of Madrid, selfless defenders of their home city. She wrote: "Madrid has displayed remarkable staunchness and steadfastness. Never before has a city, in conditions of modern warfare and under continuous bombardment, been able to resist with such heroism and resolve."<sup>2</sup>

The Communist writer Krystu Belev in his book *Spain Calls*, published in Paris in the autumn of 1937 and later illegally dis-

<sup>1</sup> S. Minkov, *Madrid Is Burning*, 2nd ed., Sofia, 1945, p. 101 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>2</sup> Maria Grubeshliyeva, *What I Saw in Spain at the Writers' Congress in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona*, Sofia, 1938, p. 44 (in Bulgarian).



Bulgarian volunteers: officers and political commissars

tributed in Bulgaria, gave a glowing account of the courageous work of the Bulgarian volunteers in Spain and of the wonderful job the Spanish workers and peasants were doing in the rear to help defeat the fascists.

On the occasion of the second anniversary of the civil war the newspaper *Zarya* of July 27, 1938, wrote: "It would be hard to find in human history a more heroic epic of the struggle of a whole people against enslavers and aggressors."

The communist and democratic press produced a mass of evidence to show how the fascist powers were helping the insurgents and severely criticised the policy of "non-intervention". "It is only 'neutrality' that helps the Spanish insurgents to crucify the Republic, to undermine the foundation of world democracy," wrote the newspaper *Tribuna* published by Communists and Left-wing Socialists, on October 10, 1936. "Raise the blockade of the Spanish Republic!" demanded the democratic newspaper *Vedrina* (Freshness) on September 18, 1936. "The London Non-Intervention Committee is a piece of terrible and cynical hypocrisy," stated the weekly *Stranitsy* on October 27, 1937.

In the conditions created in Bulgaria by the monarcho-fascist police regime it was very difficult to express sympathy for the Spanish Republic by organising conferences, meetings and demonstrations. The Bulgarian anti-fascists showed their solidarity mainly by sending messages of greetings from the workers, peasants, young people and soldiers. "We shall never stop thinking for a moment about the valiant struggle of the Spanish people against



the insurgent generals," wrote a group of soldiers of the Sofia garrison in a letter to Largo Caballero, Premier of the Spanish Republic. The illegal All-Bulgaria Conference of the Trade-Union United Front sent a message to the heroic Spanish workers. In the summer of 1937, sixty-nine prominent Bulgarian doctors in a letter to Lord Robert Cecil, Chairman of the International Peace Committee, presented a protest against the fascist terror in Spain and expressed their solidarity with the Spanish democrats.

One concrete result of the activity of the Communists and all anti-fascists in support of the Spanish Republic was the collection of means of material assistance. Money, clothing, medicines and food supplies were collected all over the country illegally.

The Bulgarian Government was forced in some measure to heed the voice of the people. Neither the head of the Bulgarian Government Kyoseivanov nor any of his ministers, although entirely on Franco's side, dared to come out openly in his support. Despite the fact that it allowed an unofficial representative of the insurgents to reside in Sofia as early as 1936, the Bulgarian Government did not recognise the Franco regime in November 1936, as did the other fascist states, but only in March 1939, that is, after the "democratic" governments of Britain and France had done so.

As in other countries, many anti-fascists in Bulgaria were keen to go and fight for Spanish freedom. In January 1937, a Bulgarian delegation, including YCLers and members of the socialist and agricultural youth unions, visited the USSR. A report presented to the Communist Youth International stated that thousands of Bulgarian young people wanted to fight for Republican Spain, but that the government was putting all kinds of obstacles in their way and the majority were unable to carry out their wish. All the same despite the obstacles and restrictions, nearly 460 Bulgarian volunteers fought in Spain. More than two-thirds of the Bulgarian volunteers were Communists. Nearly all the rest were non-party or sympathisers of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The volunteers also included a few anarchists, Social-Democrats and members of the Agricultural Union.

Many Communist volunteers were active members of the Party and the Young Communist League, and some of them were members of their central committees (Sybi Dimitrov, Ruben Avramov, Spas Georgiyev, Dimitr Papajakov, Kosta Penev, Blagoi Ivanov, Raiko Damyarov). These well-tried members of the Communist Party had much practical experience of setting up illegal organisations among the civilian population and in the army in conditions of harsh fascist dictatorship, experience of leading mass armed struggle against reaction. They had been through all the horrors of the fascist prisons and faced death more than once. The rich



Bulgarian volunteers.

First row left to right: engineer Zhecho Gyumyushev (Raiko Gryncharov), Ferdinand Kozovsky (Colonel Petrov), Karlo Lukanov (Colonel Belov), engineer Ivan Shcherev (Jaroslav Tašek)

experience of the Bulgarian volunteers in political and armed struggle was of significant help to them in the tasks they had to perform in Spain.

Most of the Bulgarian volunteers had a good mastery of military and technical skills. Their best military experts were the Bulgarian political emigres who had lived in the USSR. There were about a hundred of them. They had taken part in the September uprising of 1923 and in the guerrilla movement in Bulgaria from 1924 to 1925; they had also served at some time in the Bulgarian Army, and during their stay in the USSR, in the Red Army. They included highly qualified engineers and doctors. All those with a sound military, political and professional background were appointed to responsible posts by the Spanish Government or given commands in the International Brigades. Ferdinand Kozovsky (Colonel Petrov) and Tsvyatko Radoinov (Colonel Radionov) were military advisers on sectors of the Madrid Front. Pyotr Panchevsky, who had graduated a military engineering academy in the USSR, was adviser to the chief of the engineer corps of the Spanish Republic. He was involved in the preparation and conduct of a number of major operations. Ruben Avramov (Miguel Gomez) worked at the central school for commissars and helped to edit the magazine *El Comisario*, organ of the General Military Commissariat.



A group of Bulgarian volunteers took an active part in organising and operating the international brigade base at Albacete. In the second half of 1937 Karlo Lukanov (Belov) was chief of the base. Under his leadership much was done to strengthen the apparatus and organise schools for training volunteers in various military skills. Georgi Mikhailov (Zhelezov) was in charge of the personnel department of the International Brigades from 1937 to 1938. Bulgarian officers took part in the formation and work of training centres in Pozorrubio, Casas Ibañez, Cambrills, Figueras, Olot, and elsewhere. Lyubomir Todorov (Karbov), Doncho Dyanov, Iliya Balev and others were of great help in organising the central supply service in Albacete catering for the International Brigades. Its chief from December 1936 to June 1937 was Karbov, under whose direction supply services were set up in the brigades.

There were twenty-five Bulgarian officers working as military instructors, mainly in the Spanish units, where officers as well as soldiers often lacked sufficient military training. They taught the Spaniards and officers and men of other nationalities weapon-handling and the tactics of modern warfare. This work continued even during military operations and at the front line in the heat of battle.

The Bulgarian volunteers worked and fought as instructors or advisers in many Republican formations and units—in eight corps, 14 divisions and more than 20 brigades. In the medical service of the International Brigades, its central and lower echelons, there were fifteen Bulgarians working alongside doctors of other nationalities in organising and administering medical aid: Tsvetan Kristanov (Oscar Telge), Peter Kolarov (Franek), Konstantin Michev (Minkov), Simeon Grozev, killed at Brunete, Georgi Dobrev Stoyev (Schwarz), Raiko Radevsky (Rodez), and others. Doctor Kristanov was for a long time chief of the medical service of the International Brigades, and Kolarov and Michev his deputies.

The following figures show the scale of activity of the Bulgarian and other doctors in the international medical service. At the beginning of 1938 it had 240 doctors of various nationalities, more than 800 people with intermediate medical qualifications and about 1,500 junior medical assistants and helpers. They served seventeen permanent hospitals with five to six thousand beds. In addition, in 1937 nearly forty mobile field hospitals, that were either closed down or passed on to the medical services of the Spanish units when the International Brigades were moved to another front, were organised on the fighting lines. Its ambulances and transports made a total of 170 vehicles. All together in 1937, 27,015 wounded soldiers, internationalists and Spaniards, passed through the permanent hospitals.

There were twenty Bulgarian engineers and several technicians working in the war industry of the Spanish Republic, sharing

their experience and knowledge with Spanish experts and helping to arrange the production of arms and ammunition. Engineer Stoiko Marinov (Paul Samter) was appointed chief of the artillery section of the Arms Commissariat on February 1, 1937. Engineers Nikolai Vasilev Kolarov and Nedelcho Chobanov were working on orders from the Ministry of Defence. Kolarov was an adviser to the engineering units of the Central Front. He took an active part in building the railway that joined Madrid with the Valencian line and facilitated the transportation of supplies to the capital and the Central Front and also the strategic movement of troops. Chobanov taught at a sapper school and at the same time supervised the building of roads and fortifications on the Ebro sector.

Engineers Ivan Shcherev (Tašek) and Zhecho Gyumyushev (Gryncharov) and Spanish engineers organised production of searchlights for anti-aircraft defence in Madrid. The greater part of the Bulgarian volunteers were in the field army, mainly in the infantry and artillery units, and they fought on nearly all fronts of the Republic.

Some individual Bulgarian volunteers took part in the fighting against the fascists as early as the summer of 1936, and also in the first regular international unit—the 11th Brigade, which was formed at the beginning of November 1936. On November 9, 1936, it counter-attacked the fascists in the Madrid park Casa de Campo, in the University City, and threw them back beyond the River Manzanares. It was here that the Bulgarian Ferdinand Kozlovsky (Petrov) began his military service and was appointed second-in-command of the newly organised 12th International Brigade, under the Hungarian Máté Zalka (Lukács).

This brigade received most of the Bulgarian volunteers arriving in Spain at that time. They were all enlisted in the Balkan company of the Thaelmann Battalion, which consisted of volunteers of Balkan and Slav nationalities. The company took part in all the glorious campaigns of the 12th Brigade, from the first attack on the Cerro de los Angeles Height on November 13, 1936, and the fighting in the University City to the triumphant defeat of the Italian intervention forces in March 1937. In April and May 1937 the Balkan Company became the nucleus of the reformed battalion named after the Yugoslav Communist revolutionary Djuro Djaković; this battalion was commanded by the Bulgarian volunteer Nikola Marinov (Khristov), who had formerly commanded the Balkan Company.

During the heavy fighting in the University City the 12th Brigade relieved the 11th, which had been exhausted by the ten days' battle and heavy losses. On November 19 to 20 the Balkan Company occupied the building of the Agricultural Science Faculty but was attacked by fascist tanks from the rear. Withdrawing to



new positions in the University City and suffering heavy losses, it held up the further advance of the fascists who were trying to break through to the districts of Madrid proper. The next day the company counter-attacked under the command of Captain Khristov.

After stubborn fighting in the University City in the western sector of the Madrid defences the 12th Brigade launched a successful offensive on the Guadalajara sector along the Zaragoza highway at the beginning of January. As part of the Dabrowski Battalion the Balkan Company stormed the village of Almadrones, taking prisoners and equipment. Other battalions of the brigade liberated the populated areas of Algora and Mirabueno.

Two months later the Balkan Company was once again on the Guadalajara sector. Two international brigades—11th and 12th—and other shock units of the Republican Army faced up to an attack by four divisions of the Italian expeditionary corps at the beginning of March. Captain Khristov was put in charge of this sector of the front with the task of securing the brigade's right flank and the whole group of Republican troops. The Balkan Company with the Spanish units attached to it carried out this task. On March 18 the Republican front launched a counter-offensive and the Balkan troops and other attacking units of the 12th Brigade entered Brihuega that evening.

In the battle on the Jarama in February 1937 two groups of Bulgarians fought as part of the Balkan Company and in the ranks of the Georgi Dimitrov Battalion of the newly formed 15th International Brigade. This battalion included twenty Bulgarian volunteers. The commander of its first company, where the Bulgarians were concentrated, was Mavrodiyeu (Ivan Tsipurkov); the commissar of the company and later of the whole battalion was Dobroyev (Miron Georgiyev). The battalion was commanded by Ivan Ivanov Paunov (Grebenarov), an outstanding figure in the military organisation of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the twenties, who had received his military training in the Soviet Union. A highly skilled officer, devoted and extremely brave, warm-hearted in his relations with his subordinates and much loved by them, Grebenarov was for all a splendid example of courage and resolve in battle.

In *The Book of the 15th Brigade*, published by its commissariat in Madrid in 1938, the Dimitrov Battalion was described as follows: "They had justifiably earned a record as our crack battalion. At the Jarama . . . they were the core of resistance in every defence, the spearhead of every attack."<sup>1</sup>

The battalion went into action on February 12 in the sector where the main forces of the fascists tried to break through. For many

days the Dimitrov men fought off several attacks every day by Moroccans and frequently counter-attacked themselves. The battalion commander, the company commanders and all other officers and commissars of the battalion were always in the front ranks of the fighting men in these engagements, encouraging them and leading the attacks. Grebenarov, Mavrodiyeu, Pyotr Aleksiyeu and other Bulgarians died heroically in these battles. The casualty lists testify to the self-sacrifice and heroism of the volunteers in the bloody fighting on the Jarama: after five days—from February 12 to 17—only 215 men were left out of the 565 of the Dimitrov Battalion. Other battalions of the 15th Brigade suffered similar losses.

Nearly all the Bulgarian volunteers in the Djaković and Dimitrov battalions, the Vasil Kolarov Battery and the tank units took part in the next big battle on the Madrid Front, the Brunete operation in July 1937.

The Djaković Battalion consisted of volunteers from the Balkan countries and Spaniards. Bulgarian officers and instructors took an active part in organising and training the men of the battalion. Besides the battalion commander, Khristov, and several staff officers, two of its company commanders and a number of platoon and section commanders were also Bulgarian volunteers. This battalion, which was part of the 45th Division, arrived at the front near Brunete on July 14, 1937, when the Republican Army's offensive had halted and it took up defence, beating off fascist attacks. The battalion engaged in heavy defensive fighting and launched several counter-attacks. During one of them Georgi Zhulev, one of the battalion's staff officers, Captain Todorov, a company commander, and other Bulgarian volunteers died heroically.

The Dimitrov Battalion, which had not yet rested after four months of positional warfare on the Jarama, marked the first day of the Brunete operation by successfully attacking the enemy position at Villanueva de la Cañada and took part in the Republican Army's seizure of the town. For three weeks the Dimitrov men were in the field, inflicting heavy losses on the fascists, and losing a larger part of their own men. By the end of the operation only 143 were left out of 445. The Bulgarians, like the other Dimitrov men under the command of the Hungarian volunteer Mihály Szalvai, known under the pseudonym of Chapayev, devoted every effort to make the operation successful in the unbearable July heat and under a murderous enemy fire. They were set a fine example by the battalion commissar, the Bulgarian Prodan Tabakov, who more than once led the men in attack, organised fighting reconnaissance and led units of the battalion out of encirclement.

Nine Bulgarian tank officers, who arrived in Spain in March 1937, received their baptism of fire at Brunete. Commanding

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the 15th Brigade*, Madrid, 1938, p. 299.



tanks and tank platoons, they took part in offensive and defensive operations. The Bulgarian tank men formed part of the tank unit which on July 23 to 25, at the Republican Army's gravest hour, counter-attacked the enemy infantry that had broken through, and helped to restore the position at the front.

In October of the same year on the Aragon Front the Bulgarian tank men took part in an abortive tank attack at Fuentes del Ebro. In the extremely difficult conditions of this battle, which took place over marshy ground, the Republican tank crews, including the Bulgarians, showed heroism and self-control. For example, tank commander Georgi Toshev (Khristo Doichev), after successfully disengaging, returned to help his comrades whose tanks had been bogged down or were crippled by the enemy. The platoon's second-in-command Georgi Yankov (Mirko Stankov), whose tank caught fire and whose gun and machine-gun were put out of action, was surrounded by fascists but did not lose his self-control, broke through the enemy ring and brought his tank out of battle. Boris Shishkov (Spas Belkov Filippov), second-in-command of a tank regiment, chose to die in a burning tank rather than surrender to the fascists. G. Toshev and V. Kunchev came out of battle badly wounded.

During the Republican Army's offensive operations on the Aragon Front, which began on August 22, 1937, the Djaković and Dimitrov battalions also took part in the assault on and liberation of the towns of Quinto and Belchite, which the Nazi military engineers had turned into fortresses. The Dimitrov Battalion displayed splendid fighting qualities in desperate street fighting.

After the Aragon operations the Dimitrov Battalion and the Djaković and Masaryk battalions became part of the newly organised "Slavonic" International Brigade, which was given the number 129. In March and April 1938, when the insurgents and intervention forces broke through the Aragon Front and struck eastwards, cutting the territory of Republican Spain in two, the 129th International Brigade held up the enemy on the main breakthrough sector, and then became part of the Levante Front, at which Franco struck his next blow. For successful fulfilment of these missions the 129th Brigade received a commendation from the corps commander and was awarded the Medal of Valour by the Spanish Government.

A group of Bulgarian volunteers (forty men) was put into the separate battalion of the 45th Division (the so-called Divisionario), which was operating on the northern flank of the breakthrough. Most of them were killed or wounded in the exceptionally stubborn and bitter fighting during the last major operation of the Republican forces on the River Ebro. The Bulgarian gunners of the 45th and 35th divisions also took part in this action.

This brief account of the operations of the Bulgarian volunteers should be concluded with a mention of the Kolarov Battery and the Bulgarian airmen.

The battery was formed in March 1937 as a unit of the Slavonic heavy artillery battalion. The forty Bulgarian volunteers who served in this battery and battalion fought for over a year on the Southern Front.

Three Bulgarian pilots, Zakhary Zakhariyev, Kirill Kirillov and Nikolai Vatov, arrived in Spain with other internationalist airmen in August 1936, when the Spanish Republic had only a few pilots and old-fashioned aircraft. The Italo-German air force was in command of the air. In this difficult situation the Bulgarian airmen in September and October bombed enemy targets and engaged in combat with the fascist aircraft. For their exploit in Spain Vatov and Kirillov were decorated with the Soviet Orders of the Red Banner and Zakhariyev became Hero of the Soviet Union.

On September 23, 1938, after the withdrawal of the international brigaders from the front, the volunteers from countries ruled by reaction and fascism, including the Bulgarians, could not return home. Because the government of Bulgaria had deprived them of citizenship, the Bulgarian volunteers remained in Spain while waiting permission to enter some other country. Together with other international brigaders they again took up arms to check the invasion of Catalonia by the Franco troops and Italian interventionists and to cover the evacuation of the civil population. On February 8, 1939, the volunteers, along with the last Spanish units crossed the French frontier maintaining strict discipline. The French authorities put them in concentration camps.

This was the beginning of a long and persistent struggle for the liberation of the Bulgarian volunteers. Bulgarian public opinion succeeded in gaining permission for some of them to return to their homeland. Many of them went to the USSR and other countries or returned to Bulgaria illegally. Others succeeded in escaping from the camps and later joined the French and Belgian Resistance movements. The Bulgarian brigadier Todor Angelov became one of the outstanding leaders of the anti-fascist Resistance in Belgium and died a hero. Grateful Belgium erected a memorial to him in Brussels.

In rendering the Spanish Republic moral, material and military assistance, the Bulgarian anti-fascists performed their internationalist duty and made a modest contribution to the struggle of the Spanish people against the onslaught of internal and world fascism.

It must be noted that the movement in aid of the Spanish Republic was of considerable help to the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party for the setting up of a Popular Front in Bulgaria itself.



The Spanish events exerted a positive influence on the Bulgarian anti-fascist movement and enriched it with fighting experience for further armed struggle against fascism from 1941 to 1944. Immediately after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union the BCP steered a course towards armed uprising. The former fighters of the International Brigades who had been living in emigration in the Soviet Union returned to Bulgaria (in submarines or by air). On arriving in their country, they immediately joined with other international brigaders in organising armed anti-fascist Resistance in Bulgaria. In this tough period its leaders included the former volunteers Sybi Dimitrov, Tsvyatko Radoinov, Dimo Dichev, Spas Georgiyev, Avgust Popov, Vlado Trichkov, Sybi Dichev, Vlado Georgiyev, Raiko Damyanov, Boris Popov and Kirill Khalachev. During the popular uprising of September 9, 1944, a former international brigader Blagoi Ivanov was deputy commander-in-chief of the rebel forces. Sybi Dimitrov, Tsvyatko Radoinov, Yordan Kiskinov and many other international brigaders gave their lives for the victory of the Bulgarian people.

After the triumph of the popular uprising the great majority of former volunteers took responsible posts in the Party, the army, the economy, the administrative apparatus and in mass public organisations. The former international brigaders who became prominent figures in the state and Party of the People's Republic of Bulgaria include ministers Dimo Dichev (Yanov), Ruben Avramov (Miguel Gomez), Karlo Lukanov (Belov) and Pyotr Panchevsky and generals Ferdinand Kozovsky (Petrov), Blagoi Ivanov, Zakhary Zakhariyev and Kirill Kirillov.

Socialist Bulgaria has high regard for the heroism of the international brigades. The Presidium of the People's Assembly of Bulgaria expressed this nation-wide recognition when it decorated the former fighters of the International Brigades with the Order of "People's Freedom. 1941-1944", First Class.

## CANADA

More than 1,200 Canadians crossed the Atlantic to help resist the fascist invasion which proved to be the prelude to World War II. Like all the members of the International Brigades from many lands, the Canadian volunteers understood that on those Spanish battle fronts the readiness of mankind to defend democracy and human freedom was being put to the test and that the fundamental interests of their own country were at stake. This is why the 600 Canadians who lost their lives fighting the fascists in Spain are worthy of their country's honour and respect as true patriots and heroes.

The idea of a Canadian contingent to fight in defence of the democratically established Republic of Spain arose in the early days of October 1936. It was obvious that Spain was the victim of foreign invasion. The insurgent generals were landing Moroccan troops on the peninsula. Under the guise of giving aid to their fellow fascist Franco, Hitler and Mussolini had embarked on their joint invasion of Spain.

In October 1936 the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, Tim Buck, was visiting Spain to get acquainted with the situation in the country on the spot. He was at a sector of the front near Aranjuez (45 kilometres from Madrid), when he received an invitation to attend a meeting in Madrid at which it was planned to discuss the setting up of International Brigades of volunteers to defend the Spanish Republic. José Díaz, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, and a representative of the Communist Party of France put forward a concrete plan.

According to this plan, foreign volunteers fighting in the 5th Regiment and other militia units and columns, who numbered more than 2,000 in all, and also the new volunteers who were arriving from abroad, were to be organised as special military units known as International Brigades. Depending on the number of volunteers of different nationalities, they would be organised as units of one



nationality or of mixed nationalities. But the main aim was to organise the foreign volunteers into an armed force sufficiently powerful to make a substantial contribution to the military defence of the Republic and to provide a powerful demonstration of military support for the Spanish people from world democracy. When asked about arms and equipment, the representative of the Communist Party of France replied that the Mexican Government would sell arms to Spain, while the Soviet Union had agreed to supply the Republic with all the necessary military material, in particular, planes and tanks.

Immediately upon his return to Canada Tim Buck reported on his visit and the plan to set up International Brigades to the Political Committee of the Canadian Communist Party, which decided at once to mobilise the entire party membership and the widest possible circles of Canadian democrats in a campaign to aid the Spanish Republic.

This decision, incidentally, was prompted by a number of events.

Earlier on Dr Norman Bethune, a member of the Communist Party from Montreal, had suggested to the Quebec Party Committee that it should send him to Spain in his professional capacity and organise a Canadian mobile blood transfusion unit to serve the Republican forces at the front. The organisation of the Blood Transfusion Unit was well under way. Other measures were also being taken, including the raising of funds to buy an ambulance for the Republican Army. These facts, together with the active participation of the public in the subsequent financing of Canadian medical establishments in Spain, show that the movement to aid Spanish democracy had broad support. The Blood Transfusion Unit (which included Dr Norman Bethune and his colleagues Hazen Sise, Ted Allan, and later Allan May and Doctor Hene, as well as the interpreter Henning Sorensen and Miss Jean Watts, who drove an ambulance) were an integral part of that movement.

Dr Bethune sent the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy regular reports on the work of his unit which convey the atmosphere of the heroic struggle of the defenders of Madrid. The following is an extract from a letter which he sent in January 1937:

"As you know, we have withstood the most serious attempt by the fascists to take Madrid by storm since the first and second weeks of November. Their losses have been terrific. They attacked in dense lines like the Germans in France in 1917. Our machine-guns simply mowed them down. Our losses were one to five of theirs.

"The International Brigades have suffered badly, of course, as they act as shock troops. But large reinforcements of French, Germans, English, Polish, Austrians and Italians, with some Americans and Canadians, are arriving.

"We have been having two to four raids a day for two weeks now, and many thousands of non-combatants, women and children, have been killed.

"Yesterday we did three transfusions—this is about the average daily, besides the blood we leave at hospitals for them to use themselves....

"This is a grand country and a grand people. The wounded behave wonderfully.

"After I had given a transfusion to a French soldier who had lost his arm, he raised the other to me as I left the room and with his raised clenched fist exclaimed: 'Viva la Revolucion!' The boy next to him was a Spaniard—a medical student shot through the liver and stomach. When I had given him a transfusion and asked him how he felt, he said: 'It is nothing—Nada'. He recovered—and so did the Frenchman.

"We all feel enormously encouraged by your grand support. You may rest assured and give our assurance to the workers of Canada that their efforts and money are saving many Spanish, French, German and English lives. We will win! The fascists are already defeated. Madrid will be the tomb of fascism!"

The Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, which assumed responsibility for financing and maintaining the Canadian Mobile Blood Transfusion Unit, was an expression of the depth of Canadian popular sympathy with the democratic Spanish Republic and of the fruitful activity of the united front in Canada which led the campaign for the defence of the Republic. The popularity enjoyed by Dr Bethune's unit and the activity of the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy greatly promoted the success of the campaign to set up a military contingent of Canadian volunteers in Spain.

Along with the capitalist press and the fascist elements in Canada and the United States, the government at Ottawa did its best to counteract the wide democratic sympathy felt in Canada for the Spanish people. Having proclaimed a policy of neutrality, the government took all manner of measures to prevent Canadians from taking part in the war, including the promulgation of an Order-in-Council making it illegal for Canadians to serve as belligerents "on either side" in Spain. Fortunately the Blood Transfusion Unit had gone overseas before the Order was promulgated, but the threat of persecution hanging over the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy inevitably restricted the scope of its activities.

As a result of the Order young Canadian patriots fighting against the nazi-fascist invasion of Spain were compelled to do so in defiance of Canadian law. Young men whose departure for Spain should have been an occasion for public demonstrations emphasising the unity of democratic internationalism and true patriotism had to leave their homes and country on the pretext of a "visit





Canadians of the Lincoln and Washington battalions. June 1937

to Europe". They travelled to Spain illegally and risked becoming the victims of the perfidy of "non-intervention" even before they set foot on Spanish soil.

The leadership of the Communist Party of Canada decided that true patriotism required that the Foreign Enlistment Act imposed by the Order-in-Council should be ignored. Whatever restrictions the legislation imposed, the Party should appeal publicly to anti-fascist Canadians to give military aid to the embattled Republic of Spain which had become the front line in the world struggle to maintain democracy against the fascist offensive.

The public campaign to raise a Canadian contingent was launched at a great mass meeting in Toronto at which Tim Buck reported on the position in Spain to more than four thousand people. He argued convincingly the need for organising a Canadian contingent and urged anti-fascists who were young and in good physical condition to volunteer. He then toured the whole country from the Atlantic to the Pacific repeating this appeal.

The response was tremendous. Militant young Canadian anti-fascists came forward at meeting after meeting to answer the call of Spanish democracy. The fact that the number of volunteers was so large even caused some organisational difficulties at the beginning. More and more set out for Toronto under their own steam from such distant parts as the Pacific coast, the prairie and maritime provinces, northwestern Ontario and Quebec.

The organised selection of men for the Canadian contingent began at a meeting of the first volunteers to arrive from other

parts of the country and volunteers of the City of Toronto and its environs. It was these men who proposed that the Canadian contingent should be called the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion after two great leaders of the Canadian liberation movement, and that the battalion's colours should bear the two dates 1837 and 1937, the first to commemorate the glorious days of the national liberation movement.

Acting on the proposals made by these first volunteers, the Communist Party of Canada leadership established a special national subcommittee to be responsible for all the work in connection with volunteers, and called upon provincial party committees to set up corresponding bodies in all the main centres. The local subcommittees were charged with ensuring that each volunteer had a medical examination before leaving the area, raising money for his fare, supplying him with temporary accommodation, and so on. Thanks to the tireless work of these local bodies, the stream of volunteers to Toronto was co-ordinated with the availability of steamship tickets to France via Montreal, Quebec City and New York. The fact that, with very rare exceptions, doctors all over Canada performed medical examinations free of charge for the volunteers was an indication of the wide sympathy with Republican Spain.

In defiance of the will of those governments which, because they were dominated by monopoly capital, were indifferent to the



Dr Bethune makes blood transfusion to a patient. He is assisted by Henning Sorensen



fascist onslaught against Spain and thereby enticed bourgeois democracy further down the path of acquiescence in the victory of fascism, the volunteers from other countries, including the Canadians, stepped into the breach and changed the words "No pasarán" ("They shall not pass") from a purely Spanish slogan into the slogan of world democracy.

In proving the oneness of democratic internationalism and true patriotism, they wrote a glorious page in the history of Canada.

Arriving in Paris, the first groups of Canadian volunteers went to the headquarters of the Communist Party of France, explained that they were members of the Canadian Battalion and asked advice on the best way for them to get to Spain. After 200 such callers, at the rate of forty to fifty per week, the Paris organisation of the French Communist Party invited the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion to post a representative permanently in Paris to meet volunteers and to arrange through the French Communists for temporary accommodation and the final stage of their journey to Spain.

The last lap of the volunteers' odyssey was always exhausting and nearly always very difficult. The "non-intervention" policy of the French Government made it impossible for volunteers to cross into Spain by ordinary commercial transportation. Lionel Edwards, one of the volunteers, recalls his journey from New York to Spain via France:

"The S.S. *Roosevelt* was in luck. Prosperity must surely have returned. Ninety-six passengers and all booked for France! Among them were three elderly ladies who, on hearing that there were 93 raving Bolsheviks aboard, sought sanctuary in their cabins and did not surface until the liner docked.

"Où allez-vous, Monsieur?" The Sureté official was polite.

"We are going to Paris to study art."

The official smiled slightly.

"The strange French train was crowded as it sped its way through the green meadows of Normandy. Paris. A few days later, away to be billeted in Alais, twin community of the nearby and more famous Arles.

"Bill was called away for a conference. When he returned he briefed the group.

"We take a bus from the town square at six and we ride for about 20 kilometres; then it will be dark. Then we hit the ditch. The border troops will be strung out, so we'll have a good chance to get through. The smugglers will guide us."

The sun was setting as the convoy got under way. The vehicle stopped; it was late twilight now. Quietly they got off, ran to the ditch and waited until the black night had set in. Through the gloom small figures appeared carrying bundles of rope sandals known all over Catalonia as alpargatos.

"No smoking, no lights and no talking! They are watching for us, but if we obey instructions, we will get through. The border is at the top of the mountain. It will take all night to get there."

"The night march began and for those still living it will never be forgotten. 'Voilà la frontière de l'Espagne!' were the shouts from the van. '¡Salud, compañeros! Miren la casa blanca es Española!' said a rifleman.

"The scholar and historian may tell of Xenophon's Greeks, Caesar's legions and the Old Guard of Bonaparte, but these young men from far-off Canada were to be fighters of a different breed. Their lineage was to be traced back to the Ironsides, the tattered band at Valley Forge, Jemappes, the Paris Commune and the barricades of old Petrograd. They were not soldiers yet; but they would learn the trade and apply it well."<sup>1</sup>

Some Canadians fought in the Spanish national-revolutionary war right from the time in November 1936, when the international volunteers rushed into action in the University City, in the suburbs of Madrid, and stopped the fascist onslaught which threatened to sweep right into the city.

In that crucial battle the international volunteers were a "brigade" only by virtue of their élan. They had never engaged in military exercises as a brigade, or even drilled together as units. They came from a dozen different countries and spoke a dozen different languages, and their commander had never seen them all together at one time. He himself had lived in many countries, including Canada, as a political refugee from fascism. But, because the volunteers knew what they were fighting for, they stopped the fascist regulars and inflicted heavy losses on them.

The first Canadian unit, a section of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, of the 15th International Brigade, received its baptism of fire in the desperately-fought battle of the Jarama.

It was with the same brigade in the Brunete offensive that the Canadian volunteers distinguished themselves in the attacks upon the fascist strong point of Villanueva de la Cañada. It was then that their American comrades-in-arms bestowed the nickname of "the fighting Canucks" on them as a tribute to their audacity in attack and their tenacity in defence.

Canadians were to be found in other battalions of the 15th Brigade, namely, the George Washington and Dimitrov battalions, and in the English company of the 14th Brigade, anti-aircraft, artillery and anti-tank units, guerrilla detachments, transport, armories and medical service of the Republican Army.

At the request of the Canadian Communist Party, Bob Kerr of Vancouver was taken out of the front line early in the summer of 1937 and attached to the Brigade Cadres Department in Albacete,

<sup>1</sup> *The Marxist Quarterly*, No. 18, 1966.



with the special task of keeping incoming Canadian volunteers together at the base and helping to sort out Canadians from other units to constitute the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

When the new battalion took its place as a unit of the 15th Brigade, it was decided to reorganise the brigade so that English should be the language of command throughout. To the regret of all the members of the brigade, the Canadian volunteers who had fought in the ranks of the Dimitrovs stayed with them and became separated from the main body of Canadian volunteers.

The first major engagement that the Mac-Paps fought in as a Canadian Battalion was at Fuentes del Ebro in October 1937. Their commander was Robert Thompson, an American who later became Secretary of the Communist Party of the United States. Their commissar, Joseph Dallet, was killed on the first day of the battle. His place was taken by Saul Wellman of Detroit. The following extracts from the reminiscences of two Canadians who fought in this hard battle describe individual incidents from it. Ronald Liveredge writes:

"At noon on the dot the Republican aviation zoomed in from behind the brigade, and the fascist anti-aircraft guns frantically went into action. There were about 50 planes—light bombers. They swerved to the right, came round in a half-circle, and, strung out in a line, came in for a run over the fascist lines. It was the largest number of Republican planes I ever saw in the air at one time all through the war.

"We were ready to jump off, and we waited for the tanks for one-and-a-half hours. The fascists repaired their lines. At one-thirty p.m. we heard the tanks roaring towards us from behind. Seventy-five<sup>1</sup> of them, they roared over the top of our trenches. We were amazed to see about a dozen men of the 24th Battalion (Spanish) riding on the top of each tank. Very few of the men returned.

"We scrambled out of the trenches to follow behind the tanks. The Lincolns were on our right. The British were further right. Thus the whole brigade was stretched out in a long line across the plain. The tanks spread out and started for the town at about thirty miles an hour. At the same time the fascists opened up with hundreds of machine-guns, mortars and artillery. In less than 15 minutes our company's strength was reduced by half. There was no cover.

"We advanced very slowly. Wherever there was a little hummock in the land I would set up my machine-gun and rattle off a few rounds. There was not much direction being given. Most of the officers were killed or wounded.

<sup>1</sup> The number of tanks was actually forty-three.—Ed. (see Karol Swierczewski, *W bojach o wolność Hiszpanii*, Warsaw, 1966, p. 124).

"Ahead of us we saw the tanks grinding to a halt in front of the town. Twenty-five of them were on fire.<sup>1</sup> We could see the tank men jumping out of the burning tanks and being shot as they jumped out. The advance was slowed down to a crawl. We were trying to dig in wherever we could.

"At dark our company got word to work our way a few hundred yards back on the plain. As the firing started to abate a little we made our way back. I was ordered to take my machine-gun, a loader and a few pans of ammunition and to accompany some tank engineers who were going to try to repair some of the tanks and get them back. The night was dark. The tank men were making a hell of a lot of noise working on the tanks. I heard men across the ravine. They were running towards the tanks. They were Moors and not very careful about concealing themselves. The tank men said they could not fix the tanks. They promised to whistle when they were ready to go. Before they started whistling, however, I had to open fire as the Moors were now coming up the slope."<sup>2</sup>

William Kardash, a tank lieutenant, describes the battle as follows.

"A runner brought instructions from the colonel in command of the regiment. Our company was to break through the fascist lines, destroy the machine-gun and anti-tank gun nests, fire along the fascist trenches and thus enable the Republican Army to advance.

About ten infantrymen mounted the top of each tank. Two other tank companies moved up, one on each flank. Clouds of dust rose as we advanced at a high speed. The heat inside the tank was terrific. The sound of machine-gun bullets hitting the tank resembled hail on a tin roof.

"I was observing the territory ahead, trying to locate the machine-gun nests. The driver slowed down, shouting: 'There is a deep ravine in front of us!' I ordered the driver to go ahead if the tank could make it. The tank climbed the hill and reached the fascist trenches. An incendiary bomb set fire to the tank, but it was able to advance some thirty-five yards into the rear of the fascist lines.

"The motor stopped. Smoke and flames came into the turret where I and my assistant sat. The driver attempted to restart the motor, but in vain. Some fascists stood up in the trenches watching the burning tank. The first shell I fired landed right in their trench. I continued firing at their trenches.

"Meanwhile, the fire spread into the tank, and the danger of an explosion both of the gasoline and the ammunition was becoming

<sup>1</sup> Eighteen tanks were lost in this battle.—Ed. (D. Sirkov, *In Defence of the Spanish Republic*, Sofia, 1967, p. 164, in Bulgarian).

<sup>2</sup> *The Marxist Quarterly*, No. 18, 1966.



great. To stay inside meant certain death; to jump out into the open behind the fascist lines in broad daylight was almost as dangerous. But while there is life there is hope! Some other tank might come to our assistance.

"The driver and my assistant jumped out. That was the last I saw of either of them. I kept on firing. When the gun was jammed I switched over to the machine-gun. The heat was becoming unbearable. Revolver in hand, I jumped out.

"Several hand grenades exploded at my feet. A bullet went through my leg. I fell some five yards away from the fascist trenches. I did not see much hope for myself. I kept on firing my pistol until I had one bullet left. There was one thing I knew—the fascists would not get me alive. I raised the pistol to my head and was about to fire the last shot when I saw a Republican tank speeding towards me. I waved my hand and the tank immediately came up.

"With a final effort I crawled to the tank. My right hand was hit by shrapnel from another hand grenade. I climbed on the tank which quickly sped to the Sanitary Service point."<sup>1</sup>

The next military operation in which the Canadians took part was the battle of Teruel.

On December 15, 1937, the Republican Army mounted an offensive against this heavily fortified town of considerable strategic importance. Several days later they took the city. Early in January 1938 Franco launched a massive counter-attack. The 11th and 15th brigades were called in to defend the approaches to the city. The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, together with the other battalions of the 15th Brigade, took up positions two-three miles north of Teruel, where they occupied several hillocks and a valley.

Led by Captain Edward Cecil Smith, a Toronto journalist, and by Commissar Saul Wellman, the Mac-Paps, together with the other battalions of the 15th and 11th brigades and a brigade of Spanish marines, stood up to large-scale savage attacks by the fascists. For over two weeks Franco dispatched large numbers of fresh troops into battle daily supported by heavy artillery and aircraft.

Two of the Mac-Pap companies were commanded by Canadians (Niilo Mäkelä from Timmins, Ontario, and Lionel Edwards of Vancouver). Another company was headed by a Spaniard, Ricardo Días. The machine-gun company was led by Jack Thomas, an American. Niilo Mäkelä, one of the battalion's bravest and most beloved officers, was killed two months later during the defence of Caspe.

Captain Lionel Edwards gives the following description in

<sup>1</sup> *The Marxist Quarterly*, No. 18, 1966.



Officers of the Canadian Battalion at the front

his memoirs of the conditions under which his company operated.

"Out on patrol on the eve of the attack, we got close enough to hear the enemy leaders giving pep talks; and by risking our necks a little we found out what units were against us: the Requetés, Franco's most fanatical followers. Hooded, like monks, in their woollen panchos and wearing the red beret of Navarre, these clerical maniacs were there to implement the gospel of Torquemada and restore the royal line of Carlos to the throne. Behind them was an Italian division, and manning the artillery were the German nazis.

"Early the next day the show was on. Squadrons of bombers appeared and dropped their loads. Artillery opened up. And soon I had a new conception of hell. Smoke shrouded our hill; we soon became black and grimy; and our ears did not respond to ordinary sounds like people talking or laughing. The barrage went on and soon the wounded were moaning. It was difficult getting them out as the line of escape was under terrific rifle fire. During the afternoon the shelling ceased and we knew at once that this was the signal for assault.

"Then they came shrieking and waving their rifles, in V-formation. We let them come close and then let them have it. They broke at first but then re-formed. We could clearly see these 'fearless soldiers of God' being urged on by officers with revol-



vers. We scattered them a second time. Night came on and the barrage began again.

"The nights and days that followed were a nightmare. I remember chiefly the spirit that animated us. Who were some of the men? There was a first-aid man named David who came from Southern Alberta; he always wore a belt like those you see at Stampede time in Calgary and always hummed a cowboy song "Empty Saddles in the Corral". There was Jack Thomas, an immigrant Welsh coalminer. There was an American college student who had won notice back in the States with his research on light-rays; soon he was killed.

"The end had to come. Mechanised might and overpowering numbers finally told. Our machine-guns were blown to pieces. We were under fire from nearly every side, and no more reinforcements could reach us as the hill to our right had been taken. There was only a handful of us left and our only arms were rifles. We had to make a decision. It was time for retreat.

"Carrying a wounded man, five of us, the last living, stumbled out to make a run for it. One of us was killed, and with him the wounded man. We four finally made it. We took up a position well to the rear of the hill and waited for the enemy to take over. But we waited for a long time. He was taking no chance that some of us might still be there. But he occupied the hill at last and with that ended the defence of outer Teruel."

Another heroic episode of the defence put up by the Mac-Paps at Teruel is described by Lieutenant Percy Ludwick, chief of the 15th Brigade's fortifications. He recalls the attempt of a large body of Moroccan cavalry to cut through to the rear of the Mackenzie-Papineau positions. Captain Edward Smith, displaying personal courage and coolness, quickly ordered his small staff to set up several heavy machine-guns, and they opened fire, mowing down men and horses. The rest of the Moroccans retreated panic-stricken.

The Command of the Republican Army commended the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion for the part it played in the defence of Teruel and a number of Canadians were promoted. Captain E. C. Smith was made a major, for example.

During the breakthrough by Franco and the Italian interventionists to the Mediterranean in the spring of 1938 and the heavy rearguard fighting of the Republican Army on the Aragon Front, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, like the other battalions of the 15th Brigade, retained its fighting spirit despite heavy losses.

When the Republican Army forced the Ebro on July 28, 1938, the Mac-Paps were the first battalion of the 15th Brigade to cross the river. Under the leadership of Major Edward C. Smith and Commissar Frank Rogers the Canadians quickly freed two towns from the fascists—Ascó and Flix—and, after a successful advance

on Corbera, advanced closer than any of the other Republican troops on Gandesa.

The success of the Ebro operation forced Franco to halt his offensive against Valencia and to divert his divisions to stem the offensive of the Republican Army. During the extremely hard fighting in the Sierra Pandols and the Sierra Caballs to preserve the territory gained during the Ebro operation, the "fighting Canucks" displayed their bravery and valour yet again.

In September 1938, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, like the other battalions of the 15th Brigade, was withdrawn from the front in accordance with the decision of the Spanish Government to evacuate all foreign volunteers from the country. The Canadians handed over their weapons to their Spanish comrades and prepared to return home.

But before the "fighting Canucks" left Spain they were again to demonstrate their oneness with the Spanish people in its fight for democracy. Towards the end of January 1939, when the Franco hordes were threatening Barcelona, a large body of Mac-Paps volunteered to fight for the Republic.

To sum up the role of the Canadian volunteers in Spain, one can rightly say that the officers and men of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion were the true representatives of Canadian democracy in Spain. History has shown that they were in fact the advance guard of the army which the Canadian Government eventually sent over to Europe during the Second World War to help their allies in the anti-Hitler coalition defeat the fascist attempt to enslave mankind. The glory won at great cost by the Canadian volunteers in Spain is inseparable from the history of the Canadian people.



## CUBA

From the first to the last day of the national-revolutionary war in Spain the Cuban people regarded the struggle of the fraternal Spanish people as their own sacred cause.

The solidarity movement with Republican Spain had its own specific features in Cuba, which were determined both by the traditional links between the two countries and by the political situation obtaining in Cuba in the thirties. A little over a year before the beginning of the fascist revolt in Spain the Cuban revolutionary movement was dealt a severe blow. March 1935 saw the suppression of the last significant political action by the masses that followed the overthrow of the Machado regime. The reprisals inflicted on the strikers and the murder of Antonio Guiteras in May of the same year ensured a complete victory for pro-imperialist reactionary forces. Hundreds of workers were sacked and the trade-union committees were taken over by reactionaries. It was in this situation of a temporary setback in the revolutionary movement and at the same time unceasing revolutionary ferment that the solidarity movement with the Spanish people's struggle developed.

Certain definite conditions existed in Cuba for the public expression of this solidarity: in the first place, some semi-legal progressive organisations continued to operate, and diplomatic relations were retained with the Republican Government of Spain.

In Cuba the movement to defend the Spanish Republic was initiated by Spaniards who lived on the island and were members of various democratic organisations such as the *Círculo Republicano Español* and the *Círculo Socialista Español*. Broad sections of the Cuban people soon began to take part in it.

The first stage of the struggle to defend the Spanish Republic took the form of raising funds to supply Republican troops with food, clothing, cigarettes and tobacco, etc. On pay days factory workers gave up part of their wages "for Spain". Mass meetings were held attended by representatives of the Spanish Republic—

Fernando de los Ríos and Vicente Uribe. The meetings were organised in parks and attracted vast crowds. The usual attendance was over 100,000.

The second stage of the struggle began when many Cubans expressed their desire to go to Spain and join the ranks of those who were defending the Republic. Their numbers increased as it became obvious that the insurgent generals were waging a war against the legal government of Spain with the help of Moroccan mercenaries and Italian and German expeditionary forces.

At the head of the movement of militant solidarity with the Spanish people stood the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC). The Cuban Communists regarded participation in the movement of "freedom volunteers" as their internationalist duty. They also realised the importance of the anti-fascist war in Spain for the development of the revolutionary movement in Cuba.

The reactionary Cuban Government sympathised with the insurgents, and all activities connected with giving military help to the Spanish Republic were made illegal and had to be carried on underground.

On the initiative of the CPC a special committee was set up to select and dispatch volunteers to Spain. The committee's membership included representatives from various political parties: the Communists—Victor Pina (now a captain in the Revolutionary Armed Forces), Doctor Luis Alvarez Tabío and Ramón Nicolau González; Left-wing nationalists—Officer José A. Martínez Mendez and Emilio Laurent; some members of the Liberal and Conservative parties, for example, Enrique Llaka Argudín, a former captain, and Ramón O'Farrill, a former major. It also included people who subsequently became members of the *Partido Auténtico* and the Young Cuba movement.

The development of the volunteer movement was greatly assisted by the Cuban people's revolutionary and internationalist traditions and the memory of their own struggle for independence. In the Cuban people's first war of national liberation, which began on October 10, 1868, under the slogan "Independence or death!", Russians, Chinese, Poles, Dominicans, Venezuelans and other foreign volunteers fought side by side with Cubans. In this war the army was commanded by General Carlos Roloff of Polish descent, and in the second war of independence Generalissimo Máximo Gómez, born in Santo Domingo, had command of the combined forces of the liberation army.

The first large contingent of Cuban volunteers arrived in Spain on April 15, 1937, and the last (73 people) at the end of February 1938. In all 850 Cuban volunteers fought in the Spanish Republican Army.

The departure of Cuban volunteers for Spain was accompanied by considerable difficulties. As well as selecting volunteers, it was



necessary to supply them with sufficiently reliable documents and all the other essentials. Not all the volunteers left for Spain directly from Cuba. Some were already living in the United States, others in Mexico or Venezuela, and some were in Spain itself at the time of the fascist revolt. Nevertheless they all represented the Cuban people.

The Cuban volunteers in Spain were to be found in various units of the international and Spanish brigades. Most of them fought in the 59th Battalion of the 15th International Brigade.

The exploits of workers, intellectuals and students on the battle fields of Spain are a glorious page in the revolutionary struggle of the Cuban people. Among those who laid down their lives for the freedom of Spain were the journalist Pablo de la Torriente Brau, a fine representative of the Cuban intelligentsia, a Communist and one of the leaders of the struggle against the Machado dictatorship, who was killed during the battle of Madrid in his post as commissar of the First Shock Brigade of the Republican Army and later made a national hero of Cuba, and Policarpo Candón, a brigade commander in the Republican Army, who was also killed in action.

An article published in the Republican press said: "Policarpo Candón, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, Alberto Sánchez and others are the most vital expression of the help of Cuban anti-fascists in the great struggle which we are waging in Spain against world fascism. . . . We fought side by side in dozens of battles, and Candón always remained the same—calm, firmly confident of victory, and anxious to study in any lull in action. He always inspired the respect and affection of his fellow men and officers. With the death of Comrade Candón the Spanish Army has lost one of its best leaders, and the Cuban people and the anti-fascists of the whole world a steeled fighter. . . ."

We should like to recall other, less celebrated men, who performed their internationalist and revolutionary duty to the bitter end on Spanish soil (unfortunately many of whose names have not come down to us).

There was Julio Valdés Cofiño, a member of the Young Cuba democratic organisation and artillery lieutenant in the Cuban Army, who arrived in Spain with the first group of volunteers. Here he was promoted to the rank of major and put in command of a sector of the front of the 101st Brigade. He died in the battle of Brunete together with the staff of his unit during an artillery raid.

The courageous Cuban army officers Enrique Montalbán and Fernández Marthen also lost their lives in Spain, the former at Brunete and the latter at Belchite.

Homero Meruelos Bartarain, an active fighter against the Machado dictatorship and commissar of a unit in the Abraham

Lincoln International Battalion, was killed while resisting an enemy counter-attack on the Zaragoza Front.

Lino García, an airman, Major Alberto Sánchez, commissars Efalio Goach Leon, Armando Torres, Manuel Alonso Barroso, Roberto Bruzón Neira and many others perished in heavy fighting with the fascists.

Side by side with the other defenders of the Republic Cuban volunteers fought bravely: artillery captain Pedro Dalmau Naranjo, commissars Oscar Hernández and Pablo Porras, Major Maidagán, captains Andrés González Lanuza, Miguel de la Llera Gafas, Viciado and Joseito Rodríguez Valdés, lieutenants Leopoldo Lanier Sobrado and Roberto Casals, sailors Waldo Martínez and José Agostini, doctors Rafael de la Vega and Luis Díaz Soto, medical corps officers José Campos Cuina and Mario Sánchez Díaz, nurse Pía Martelar, men and officers Humberto Alvarez, Carlos M. Parra Sarmiento, Julio Guevas, Grenet, Palacios, Manuel, Madariaga, Manolo Cueira, Landeta, Primo, Evelio Anciros Subirat, Luis Peraza, Orlando del Real, Rodriguito, Brito, Mario Morales, Manuel González and many other "freedom volunteers".

When they were leaving Spain during the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from the Republican Army, the Cuban anti-fascists held a meeting at which it was resolved to address the following letter of farewell to the Spanish people:

"Spanish brothers,

As we depart, we are taking with us the most precious treasure, of which all true anti-fascists must be proud: a sense of unity, a readiness to sacrifice oneself and the will to victory. Three unforgettable and invaluable lessons. From now onwards they shall be our motto.

Manuel des Peso (Chairman)  
J. Agostini (Secretary)."<sup>1</sup>

The widespread movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic also affected the course of events in Cuba and helped the Cuban revolutionary movement to recover from the setbacks which it had suffered as a result of the defeat of the working people in March 1935. Under pressure from the masses the Cuban Government was forced to make concessions, in particular, the dismissal of the ultra-reactionary General Montalvo.

In spite of the resistance of the reactionaries, the Communist Party of Cuba managed to secure the legalisation of party and trade-union organisations, turning the latter into bases for its revolutionary activities. The establishment of a powerful trade-union centre, the Confederation of Cuban Workers, was a great victory for the working people. Publication began in Cuba of com-

<sup>1</sup> *Frente Rojo*, November 18, 1938.



munist and democratic newspapers and the works of the founders of Marxism-Leninism. The programme of the Communist Revolutionary Union was promulgated at the Constituent Assembly of 1939, Communists were permitted to take part in drafting the Constitution of 1940.

The defeat of the Spanish people's national-revolutionary war in March 1939 did not weaken the solidarity movement in Cuba. The fraternal links between the Spanish and Cuban peoples became even stronger. Hundreds of Spanish fighters found refuge in Cuba and took part in its revolutionary movement. Volunteers who returned from Spain immediately joined in the fight against fascism and imperialism on their native soil. Many of them played an active role in the struggle against the Batista dictatorship.

José Agostini, Cuervo, Humberto Alvarez and the Communist leader Cardenas, who had all distinguished themselves in Spain, were executed by the Batista police. Noberto H. Nodal lost his life during the storming of Batista's palace on March 13, 1957.

Inspired by the heroic example of Spain, the Cuban people carried on the cause of the Spanish revolution. Cuba was the first of the Spanish-speaking countries to have a victorious socialist revolution. The first but, as Fidel Castro said, not the last. It is highly symbolic that Alberto Bayo, the Spanish war veteran, went on to become the military instructor of Fidel Castro and his heroic band from the *Granma*. The events in Spain moulded the political consciousness of the young Ernesto Che Guevara. The slogans of the heroic battle of Madrid "They shall not pass!" and "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees!" became the symbol of revolutionary Cuba's confidence in victory during the days of the Bay of Pigs.

Today the Cuban people, separated from the main imperialist power by only ninety miles of sea, are building a new society.

The Cubans, who are so greatly indebted to the heroic struggle of the Spanish people, firmly believe that they too will win their struggle for freedom.

## CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The heroic struggle of democratic Spain in 1936-39 found complete understanding and all-round support on the part of the progressive Czechoslovak public, which quickly realised the possible consequences of the fascist generals' revolt and the armed intervention of fascist states. One of the two main allies of the insurgents—Hitler Germany—was at that time posing a direct threat to the territorial integrity and state sovereignty of Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia herself, the ruling circles were working towards the limitation of democratic freedoms and the fascistisation of the state structure. Under these conditions, the progressive forces in the country and, above all, the working class, could not remain indifferent to the intervention of Italian and German fascism and to the policy of "non-intervention".

In the autumn of 1936, the Committee for Aid to Democratic Spain was founded in Prague, in which anti-fascists of diverse political convictions, religious views, and occupations co-operated. In addition to individual members, it had about 50 group members representing approximately 750,000 persons. By the end of the following year, the number of individual members of the Committee was already 1,136, and the number of group members had grown to 184. At the same time, 64 local solidarity committees had been formed. All the nationalities then inhabiting Czechoslovakia were represented in the Committee (that is, not only Czechs and Slovaks, but also Germans, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Poles).

The activity of the Committee for Aid to Democratic Spain and its affiliates was varied. They devoted much attention to the dissemination of truthful and timely information about the events in Spain, explained their meaning and significance, and tirelessly called for moral and material aid to the Spanish anti-fascists. An invaluable role in this effort was played by the illustrated monthly, *Španělsko* (Spain), published in Prague between April 1937 and



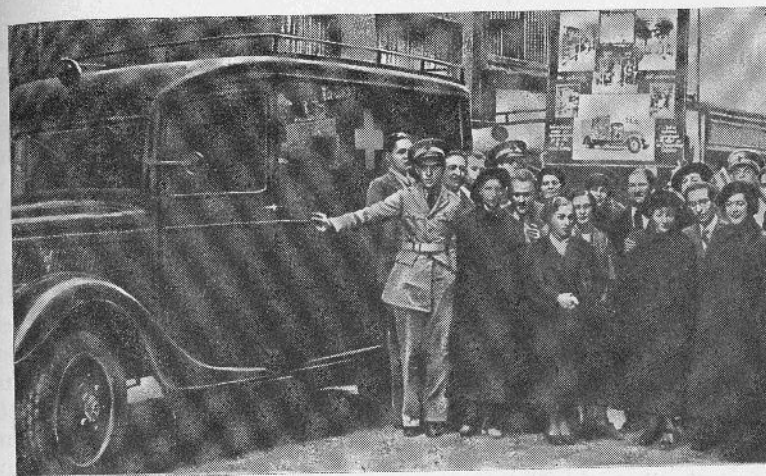
September 1938, with a circulation of 20,000 (5,000 copies of which were in German), and also the rotoprint bulletin, *Španělská Korespondence* (Spanish Correspondence). Appealing for aid to the Spanish people were many posters (the designer of one of them was Oskar Kokoschka), post cards and leaflets. Many brochures about fighting Spain were published at the Committee's expense ("The Struggle of Spanish Democracy", "Durango", "Fighting Spain", "Spain Is in Our Hearts", "Spain", and others). Exhibitions and lectures were organised, and large audiences gathered to listen to political and cultural figures who had been to Spain, while theatrical performances and films about Spain enjoyed wide attendance.

The central and local aid-to-Spain committees conducted extensive campaigns to collect money for buying food, medicine and clothing. The organisers of these campaigns displayed much inventiveness. For example, 110,000 badges with the colours of the Republican flag and the inscription in Spanish, "Viva la Libertad en España" were made and sold.

The following figures give some idea of the results of the aid campaigns: before the end of 1937, a total of over 1,000,000 korunas worth of parcels had been sent; in November and December 1937, a collection of Christmas presents was made, and parcels valued at 145,000 korunas were sent. An especially important measure was the establishment of a field hospital, named after Jan Amos Komenski, which cost 500,000 korunas to set up. Its maintenance costs after that were covered exclusively by voluntary contributions. Czechoslovak doctors received the first wounded and sick defenders of Republican Spain in that hospital as early as May 1937. The hospital was headed at first by surgeon J. Holubec, and later by Dr B. Kisch. A children's village for evacuated Spanish children was established and maintained in Southern France through the efforts of the Committee.

Organisations and people of good will all over Czechoslovakia took part in the search for ways to help Republican Spain. But the best results came from collections in the industrial and mining regions. The workers of some enterprises even assessed themselves several per cent of their monthly wages. Unquestionably, the greatest support for Spanish democracy came from the working class. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was the most active political force to come out in defence of the fighting Spanish anti-fascists. And it was the Party that in those days advanced the warning and mobilising slogan: "At Madrid they are fighting also for Prague!"

In an address to the citizens of Prague on August 12, 1936, General Secretary of the CPCz Klement Gottwald explained the meaning of the Spanish people's struggle and the significance of international solidarity. "Spain's cause is our cause," he said. "The



One of the ambulances sent by the Prague Committee for Aid to Republican Spain

insurgents would have been smashed long ago, and the blood-letting stopped, if they had not received assistance from abroad. They are backed by world reaction, and Hitler and Mussolini supply them with arms. . . . Thus, the cause of Spain has become the cause of an international struggle between fascism and anti-fascism, between the dark forces of medieval barbarity and the forces of progress, between the forces of war and the forces of peace, between fascist tyranny and democracy, between reactionary decay and civilisation."<sup>1</sup>

The Communists took the initiative and assumed the leading role in establishing and developing the activity of the committee for aid to democratic Spain. To increase aid to Spain was the purpose for which the Party mobilised all means of influence: the press, meetings at factories and in the streets, conferences of public organisations, speeches of Communist members of Parliament.

It is impossible, for lack of space, to list all public groups and organisations in Czechoslovakia which took part in the Aid Spain Movement. However, mention should also be made of the role of the progressive Czechoslovak intelligentsia, many members of which contributed all of their talent and organising abilities to this noble cause. Even before the emergence of the Committee, they had formed a society for the defence of rights and social progress, called "Solidarity" (later to become a group member of the Committee), which conducted a successful collection cam-

<sup>1</sup> *Živé tradície*, Prague, 1959, pp. 59-60.



paign. In the summer of 1937, Czechoslovak writers sent delegates to the 2nd International Congress of Anti-Fascist Writers whose sittings were held in Valencia, the temporary capital of the Spanish Republic, and in Madrid, the frontline city at the time. The Czechoslovak delegation visited the positions of the Republican Army during the fighting at Brunete. The famous publicist and anti-fascist, Egon Erwin Kisch, spent several months among the internationalists.

The solidarity movement grew. At the end of 1937, the Committee was transformed into the Society of Friends of Democratic Spain. The new organisation continued the work with doubled energy, collecting money and conducting mass meetings. For example, 3,500 persons attended a meeting of the Society in January 1938, in one of the biggest halls in Prague, and similar meetings were held in other cities. Such meetings passed resolutions denouncing the Italo-German aggression and the policy of "non-intervention", and called on the public to render even greater and more effective support to the Spanish Republic.

However, the practical results and the moral effect of the Aid Spain campaign might have been much greater, had the public initiative not been restricted by the official reactionary policy and had all democratic forces achieved unity of action.

The Czechoslovak Government continued to recognise the Spanish Republic, which had an officially accredited representative in Prague. But also staying on there as a "private party" was the former Spanish charge d'affaires, who had betrayed the Republic and now acted as a representative of the "nationalists", that is, the fascist insurgents. The Prague authorities closed their eyes to his activities directed against the legal Spanish government. Like all the other bourgeois European states, Czechoslovakia pursued a policy of "non-intervention" in its Anglo-French interpretation, that is, in the spirit of ill will to the Spanish Republic. Therefore, the government, after formally banning the export of arms to Spain and Portugal, sold them readily to other countries, under whose flag agents of the Spanish insurgents operated. At the same time, the authorities prohibited banks from transferring money to the Spanish Republic, confiscated funds collected by the Committee for Aid, and even held up parcels with medicines.

In the London Non-Intervention Committee, the Czechoslovak representative, Jan Masaryk, supported a proposal made by fascist Italy to ban all public collections for aid to the Spanish people and to prohibit the shipment of food and medicines. And in the League of Nations, the Czechoslovak delegation voted against a motion by the Spanish Republic calling for an investigation of the facts on German and Italian intervention in Spain. Such was the essence of Czechoslovakia's policy of "non-intervention" as pursued by the reactionary political parties, headed by the bour-



A poster issued by the Society of Friends of Democratic Spain with an appeal to help the Spanish people



geois-landowner agrarian party that held the key positions in the government.

The various "Socialist" parties in the government, and especially the Social-Democrats, supported the Spanish Republic in word, and their newspapers even wrote about the events in Spain and condemned the insurgents and interventionists. However, fearing that they might spoil their good relations with their reactionary partners in the government coalition, the Social-Democrats avoided any real political struggle in support of the Spanish people and against the one-sided policy of "non-intervention" that was actually aimed at strangling the Republic. The Czech Social-Democrats were hostile to the Spanish and French Popular Front, and their leaders declared that they would sooner withdraw from the Second International than agree to joint actions with the Communists.

Under the circumstances, any manifestation of solidarity with Spain on the part of workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and other democratic forces was greatly hampered. People openly supporting Republican Spain were frequently persecuted by the authorities. At the same time, the government encouraged the activities of the small but highly influential bloc of pro-Franco parties, including such separatist organisations as the party of Hungarian landowners in Slovakia, or the party of Sudeten Germans headed by Konrad Henlein—an overt Hitler agent.

The Right-wing press daily poured out torrents of malicious fabrications about the Spanish Popular Front, in every way trying to whitewash and justify the actions of Franco's junta and to defame the Czechoslovak movement for solidarity with the Spanish Republic. Hypocritically citing the agreement on non-intervention and demagogically bemoaning the fate of the poor, whom the solidarity movement allegedly milked of their last means of subsistence for the sake of helping "Red" Spain, the reactionaries called on the authorities to use police and court action to suppress the "criminal" activity of the aid committees.

There was only one social force that could be capable of giving a resolute rebuff to the intrigues of the reactionaries and to influence a change in the government's policy with respect to the Spanish Republic. That force was a united working class. That is why the Communists of Czechoslovakia, like the Comintern in the international arena, championed the idea of proletarian unity. In the beginning of August 1936, the CPCz turned to the leadership of the socialist parties with a proposal to organise joint action to help the Spanish people. The proposal was rejected, but the Party repeatedly advanced new proposals, pointing to the facts of the widening Italo-German aggression and the worsening position of the Spanish Republic, caught in the vice of a diplomatic and economic blockade.

## Španělsko za nás, my za Španělsko!

Již 10 měsíců běsní fašismus ve Španělsku. Již 10 měsíců se španělský lid udatně bije nejen s najatými vrahy z cizinecké legie a Marokánci, ale se statisícovými armádami německého a italského fašismu. Bombardování civilního obyvatelstva, žen a dětí, pustošení měst, barbarské ničení nejkrásnějších výtvarů lidského ducha a rukou, jimiž se fašismus »proslavuje« ve Španělsku, vyplní provždy nejtemnější stránky lidských dějin.

### ŠPANĚLSKÝ LID BOJUJE ZA SVĚTOVÝ MÍR.

Lidová armáda, Mezinárodní brigáda, španělský, katalánský a baskický lid nezápasí jen o svou svobodu a nezávislost, ale posílá své životy za zájmy všeho pokrokového lidstva. Německý a italský fašismus položily podkop pod světový mír. Chtějí si podmanit nejen Španělsko, ale všechny demokratické a malé státy Evropy. Přepady Španělska bez vypovězení války, využívše spiknutí několika zrádných generálů. Celý mírumilovný svět, všechny demokratické státy a zvláště Společnost národů, měly v tomto okamžiku útočníky ztrestat tak, jak je k tomu zavazují jejich podpisy na mírovém paktu a členství ve Společnosti národů. Všechny demokratické státy měly, jak to odpovídá mezinárodnímu právu, poskytnout všechny pomoci španělské republice. Ale zbabělost demokracií posílá zase jednou fašistické dobyvatelé a podněcovatele války, povzbudila jejich zpuštěnost a troufalost. Svoji váhavost a slabost je spíše pobídli k pokračování v jejich zločinu.

Mezinárodní právo, které upravuje styky mezi civilisovanými národy, všechny zásady Společnosti národů, zavazovaly k tomu, aby Španělsko bylo považováno za oběť podlého útoku, aby povstali byli postaveni mimo mezinárodní právo a mocnostem, které do Španělska vnesly válku, mělo být dáno najevo, že porušily mezinárodní právo a vystavily se následkem toho sankcím, které jsou určeny proti útočníkům. To se však nestalo. Ještě hůře:

Ve skutečnosti bylo použito sankcí proti španělské republice a byla proti ní prováděna neslychana blokáda, zatím co fašistický útočník shromažďoval na španělské půdě obrovský válečný materiál a velké vojenské formace.

Vše se děje tak, jakoby španělský lid byl vinníkem, protože brání svou národní nezávislost a svou svobodu. Mezinárodní právo je šlapáno. Svoboda je ohrožena nejen ve Španělsku, ale všude. Mír světa je ohrožen tím, že nepřítel republikánského Španělska jsou za svůj útok odměňováni.

### ŠPANĚLSKÝ LID BOJUJE ZA ZÁJMY ČSR.

Nepřítelé španělského lidu jsou i nepříteli ČSR.

Bezpečnost republiky je ohrožena, protože každý, kdo by ji chtěl napadnouti, může se domnívat, že mu jeho zločin projde právě tak beztrestně, jako ve Španělsku. A že stačí vyvolat vnitřní nepokoje pomocí henleinovců, aby byla ospravedlněna intervence hitlerovských armád v Československu. Na španělských frontách se rozhoduje i o našem osudu, o nezávislosti Československa, o svobodě jeho národů.

Ciny politických rozhodujících kruhů republiky podle toho ale nevypadají. Místo toho, aby republika okamžitě přispěchala demokratické vládě Španělska na pomoc všestrannou podporou, přihlíží trpě k dobovačným podnikům fašismu. Ba co více: U nás jsou dokonce zakazovány projevy solidarity a sbírky pro Španělsko, zatýkáni a odsazováni dělníci, kteří chtějí splnit to, co bylo povinností vlády.

The title of a leaflet circulated by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia read: "Spain Is with Us, We Are with Spain!"



However, all these appeals remained a voice in the wilderness. Although in individual cases representatives of local socialist organisations engaged in joint actions with the Communists, an agreement on united action on a national scale was never achieved. The leaders of the socialist parties continued to adhere to the principle of "everyone on his own" and preferred a split in the workers' movement to a break with the reactionary bourgeoisie. But overcoming all the hostile measures taken by the government and the ill will of the reformist parties, the campaign of solidarity with democratic Spain went down in the history of Czechoslovakia as one of the broadest popular movements since the founding of the Czechoslovak state in 1918. The democratic forces regarded aid to the Spanish people as one of their most important tasks, an essential part of their struggle to preserve peace and to safeguard the independence of Czechoslovakia.

In nothing else, perhaps, did the militant anti-fascist spirit of the working people of Czechoslovakia, their internationalism and their solidarity with democratic Spain manifest themselves so strongly as in the resolve of many to defend the Spanish Republic on the field of battle. Class hatred of fascism, anxiety for the fate of their country over which the fascist threat also hung, the feeling of international brotherhood of working people—these were the main motives prompting many Czechoslovak anti-fascists to take arms in hand. In taking this decision they were influenced by the Communist Party and the Young Communist League which for many years were educating the working people in the spirit of proletarian internationalism. The example set by Communists inspired their non-party comrades and members of other political parties.

In the very first detachments of the Spanish People's Militia, along with Frenchmen, Germans, Italians and other foreigners, were Czechs and Slovaks who happened to be on Spanish soil for various reasons at the time of the fascist revolt. At the present time, it is impossible to determine how many of them there were. The names of only five have been preserved in the records: Miloš Brožek, Roman Krobš, Miloš Sedlák, Eduard Štrof and Jaroslav Dula.

The first volunteers to leave Czechoslovakia for Spain did so in the middle of August 1936, after the CPCz created a special organisation to help volunteers to reach France and then to proceed to their place of destination. The socialist parties, however, adhered strictly to the position taken by the government coalition, that is, one of hostility to the volunteer movement.

While any manifestation of international solidarity met with official resistance, the task of organising the volunteer movement involved even greater difficulties. The reactionary press supported government repression and launched a hysterical campaign

against "the Communist recruitment of volunteers". Citing a decision of the Non-Intervention Committee, the authorities refused to give volunteers passports for going abroad. The police periodically searched the building of the secretariat of the CPCz and arrested several Party workers on suspicion of organising the departure of volunteers.

The volunteers were forced to leave for Spain illegally or to give the authorities false reasons for wanting to go abroad (to work in France or Belgium, a business trip, a visit to the World Fair in Paris, etc.). But such tricks did not always work, especially for those who were known to the police as Communists or supporters of the Spanish Republic.

The volunteers' route to Spain as a rule went through Austria, Switzerland and France. The assembly point was Paris. Some preferred to go through Germany and Belgium, others chose a longer and more complicated route through Poland and from there, depending on circumstances, by sea to France, or through Scandinavia to Holland. No route was easy.

Before leaving the country, the volunteers usually came to Prague, where they received instructions regarding their journey. Then, individually, or in small groups, they would set out on a journey that demanded courage, discipline and, most importantly, the inflexible will to reach their goal. Many were detained en route by the police in neighbouring countries and returned to Czechoslovakia, while others never even got across the border. On a second attempt to leave the country for Spain, it was always advisable to choose a new route. Whenever a large number of volunteers gathered at one time in Prague, they would leave in small groups or individually in different directions in order to avoid attracting the attention of the police and border authorities.

Among the volunteers leaving Czechoslovakia were many anti-fascist emigres, especially Germans who had found refuge in Czechoslovakia. In addition, many volunteers from Eastern and Southeastern Europe also passed through Czechoslovakia on their way to Spain. To all of them, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, working closely with the Communist parties of the neighbouring countries, especially Poland, gave the necessary assistance for continuing on to Paris, and from there to Spain.

All in all, over 2,000 Czechoslovak volunteers, including emigres from other countries, went to Spain. No less than 1,300 of these came from Czechoslovakia herself. In addition to Czechs and Slovaks, there were hundreds of Germans and Hungarians, and dozens of Ukrainians and Poles who were citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic. Workers, miners, handicraftsmen, merchants, doctors, engineers, students, peasants and office workers left their peaceful labour to become volunteer soldiers.





Positions of the Klement Gottwald Artillery Battery

Many of the volunteers were Communists, but even more were non-party people. However, after going through the crucible of combat, a considerable part of the non-party people and members of other political parties joined the Communist Party. Indeed, by the beginning of 1939, over half of the Czechoslovak international brigaders were already Communists. Of the remainder, a small group belonged to the Social-Democratic and other parties. They were all united by their anti-fascist convictions and the common will to fight.

In selecting volunteers for the International Brigades from among those wishing to go to Spain, the CPCz attached great

weight to their military training, since the Republican Army was in serious need of military specialists. Preference went to those who had gone through active military service, above all in the air force and in specialist units. Because of this, the Czechoslovak volunteers turned out to be especially helpful in the formation of the Republican military-technical fighting units.

There were small groups of Czechs and Slovaks in the first two International Brigades that were formed in November 1936. One group of ten volunteers, in the Rakosi Company of the Edgar André Battalion, included the Slovaks, Juraj Petroček and Ondrej Šima, and the Czech, Jan Krejčí. Another group, which included Laco Holdoš and Jožko Májek, went into the machine-gun company of the Thaelmann Battalion.

At the end of 1936, 40 Czechs and Slovaks and 3 Poles made up a platoon in the Mickiewicz Company of the 13th International Brigade. They became known as the Klement Gottwald Platoon. Formed at almost the same time was a Czechoslovak platoon, under the command of Gustav Lohn, in the Slavic company of the 14th International Brigade. Soon thereafter, in the Georgy Dimitrov Battalion of the 15th International Brigade, a machine-gun company made up of Czechoslovak volunteers was formed and named in honour of the renowned national general, Jan Žižka. The company commander was Kazimierz Gede, a Pole, and its political commissar was the Czech, Jaroslav Tichý. Among the company's platoon commanders and political delegates were Antonín Kobylák and Antonín Kymlička, Josef Kalaš and Jaroslav Hošek, and in the third platoon, where there were Hungarians, Maté and Stefan Fábry. At first, the Jan Žižka Company was a machine-gun company in name only: because of a shortage of arms and ammunition, it functioned in the first battles as an ordinary infantry unit.

The military knowledge of Czechoslovak volunteers was fully utilised in another branch of the service—the artillery. Twelve Czechoslovak artillery men were with the Karl Liebknecht Battery from the first days of its formation. In a few months' time, Czechoslovak volunteers made up its largest national group—43 men.

When the Gottwald Platoon (under the leadership of Lorenc Lajdl and Commissar Vendelín Opatrny) together with the Liebknecht Battery were fighting at Teruel, new groups of volunteers from Czechoslovakia were gathering in the artillery barracks at Albacete. They were led by Bohuslav Laštovička, editor of the communist newspaper, *Rudé právo*, and a former regular officer in the artillery. Thus, at the end of January 1937, a new international artillery battery was born, made up of Czechs and Slovaks and named after Gottwald. The history of the new group began in much the same way as that of many other units being formed



at the time. Its "arsenal" consisted of obsolete weapons of various systems and calibres, but the volunteers went about the task of learning to handle their weapons and instruments and studying artillery theory with great zeal. A strict daily routine was established, and political studies began.

In the beginning of February 1937, the battery was converted into an anti-aircraft battery after receiving modern military equipment—Soviet 76-millimetre anti-aircraft guns, 1931 model. The period of intensive study ended in the middle of February, and the battery, under the leadership of the Soviet instructor, Captain Semyonov, set out for the Central Front.

In June 1937, new Czechoslovak volunteers were organised to form the Májek Battery, which became part of the 1st Slavic Heavy Artillery Battalion. The battery got obsolete 150-millimetre guns (apparently of French origin), and after accelerated training, was sent to the front. Because most of the volunteers had been in the artillery during military service at home, the battery was able to fulfil its combat mission successfully. The battery commander was J. Doua, and the commissar was B. Macháček.

A year after the first Czechoslovak unit—the Gottwald Platoon—was organised a Czechoslovak battalion, named after the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, T. G. Masaryk, was formed and trained, albeit with a shortage of guns as usual, in the village of Fuentealbilla, not far from Albacete. The commanders, all graduates of international officer courses in Pozorrubio, were frontline soldiers with fighting experience. The first commander of the Masaryk Battalion was Stanislav Říha, and its commissar was Miloš Nekvasil. Although the battalion was manned with newly arrived volunteers, its nucleus consisted of experienced Dimitrovites who had been through the fire of battle. By the end of January 1938, there were 700 men in the battalion, one half of whom were Czechs and Slovaks, and the rest Spaniards. Later, like other international units, it was reinforced with Spanish soldiers.

There were some Czechs and Slovaks also in the Dimitrov and Djaković battalions of the 45th Division. Although most of the Czechoslovak volunteers served in the units already mentioned, many also fought in other units of the Republican Army. In particular, Czechoslovak volunteers who belonged to national minorities, such as the Hungarians and Germans, were assigned, on a language basis, to German and Hungarian units of the Thaelmann and Dabrowski brigades, etc.

Defending the Spanish Republic in the air, along with Spanish, Soviet and other foreign flyers, were Czechoslovak volunteer pilots Rudolf Bolfík, Jan Ferák, Rudolf John, Karol Gabula, Kříž, Karel Král, Zdeněk Talaš and Karel Vejvoda.

Czechoslovak volunteers also fought in the armoured tank units,

some having come to Spain from the Soviet Union (Oldřich Haken, Josef Hruška, Jan Mrkva, Břetislav Škarvada), and others from Czechoslovakia (Ladislav Pískovský, Bruno Pítha and others).

In the spring of 1937, a number of Czechoslovak volunteers (Vendelín Opatrny, Alois Samec, Alois Soběslavský, Kamil Kozderka, Josef Bartoš from the Gottwald Platoon, and Miloš Knézl and Karol Matych from the Žižka Machine-Gun Company) were included in a guerrilla group operating in Estremadura in the enemy's rear. Later, they were joined by Pavel Antoš, Stanislav Sedlák and Oskar Valeš.

Beginning in March 1938, some Czechoslovak artillery men served in the Rosa Luxemburg Battalion (Karel Štefek, deputy commander of the battalion; Eugen Stern, chief of staff; Géza Kršák, battery commander; and Karel Dufek, deputy battery commander).

About 15 Czechoslovak volunteers fought in the ranks of the international battalion of the 86th (mixed) Brigade, and two of them, Adolf Rach and Odpadlík, commanded other battalions of that brigade.

About 120 volunteers from Czechoslovakia were members of a separate battalion of the 45th Division that took part in the operation on the Ebro. Company commanders there were A. Soběslavský, G. Lohn and A. Kobylák.

Individual Czechoslovak volunteers fought in the cavalry, worked in the defence industry, made international broadcasts over the Madrid radio, served in the base apparatus of the International Brigades and in medical sub-units, where besides the staff of the Jan Komenski Hospital, Dr D. Talenberg and other Czech doctors worked. Gustav Šimovič, who was commander of an infantry battalion of the 11th Division, and František Knézl, commander of a combat-engineer battalion, fought in Spanish units of the Republican Army.

Czechoslovak volunteers took part in all the major battles of the war. They fought in the defence of Madrid, in the first offensive at Teruel, in the fierce battles at Brunete, in the Zaragoza operation, and on various sectors of the Southern Front. Their guns defended Madrid, Valencia, Sagunto and other important Republican points. The mountains of Levante and the banks of the Ebro were witness to their courage, valour and steadfastness.

The volunteers of the Gottwald Anti-Aircraft Battery and the Jan Žižka Machine-Gun Company distinguished themselves in the fierce battles on the Jarama. The Gottwaldites shot down three enemy airplanes in the first days of fighting. The Jan Žižka Company carried out its task successfully, although at the price of heavy losses. In the first week of fighting, the company's strength was reduced from 162 to 38 men. The battalion commissar, the Bulgarian volunteer P. Tabakov, stated that "in courage, and what



is more important, in military skill, discipline in battle, and expert handling of arms, the first place in the heroic Dimitrov Battalion unquestionably belongs to the machine-gun company".

In the summer of 1937, most of the Czech and Slovak volunteers entered the battle of Brunete with combat experience behind them. The Gottwald Platoon, for example, had been through heavy fighting at Teruel, in the mountains of Sierra Nevada, and at Pozoblanco in Andalucía. The Dimitrov Battalion came to Brunete after a 100-day positional defence on the Jarama. The artillery men of the Liebknecht Battery had supported the Republican infantry at Teruel, on the Southern Front and in Aragon near Huesca. It was the first combat action only for the Májek Battery.

The Brunete operation brought the Republic a limited success and marked the end of a definite stage in the development of the regular Republican Army, including its international formations. The relationship between the volunteers and their Spanish comrades-in-arms and the civilian population had developed into one of strong fraternal friendship. The internationalists readily passed on their military experience and knowledge to young Spanish soldiers and served as an example to them in battle. During pauses in the fighting, the volunteers helped peasants gather the harvest, put on children's plays, and distributed presents to children. They were invited into homes as especially dear guests.

In this period the ties between the volunteers and their homeland also strengthened. The self-sacrifice and heroism of the international brigaders was regarded by the working people of Czechoslovakia as the highest expression of international solidarity, and lent impetus to an even greater development of the movement to help the Spanish people. Various progressive organisations and individuals corresponded with the volunteers, supported their families both materially and morally, regularly supplied the volunteers with newspapers and magazines, and sent them presents. Organisations of the CPCz were especially active along these lines.

In the summer of 1937, a Czechoslovak delegation of Communist parliamentary deputies, headed by Jan Šverma, went to Spain to visit the International Brigades in which Czechoslovak volunteers were serving.

All these expressions of sympathy and support strengthened the morale of the volunteers and gave them the feeling of close ties with their people. They themselves closely followed the political situation at home and even took part in it. In open letters published in *Rudé právo* and other democratic newspapers, they expressed indignation over the policy of "non-intervention", protested against the arrests of Communists allegedly for recruiting volunteers, and called for the unification of Czechoslovak anti-fascist

forces into a Popular Front and for stronger support of the Spanish people.

With the aim of providing the Czechoslovak public with truthful information about the events in Spain and about the life of the internationalists, the magazine *Salud*, with a supplement called *Uoják svobody* (Soldier of Freedom), began to be published in October 1937. At the same time, a group of Czechoslovak volunteers compiled and published in Barcelona a collection called *For Peace and Freedom*, while in Czechoslovakia, a booklet entitled *Slovak Heroes in Spain* was published. All such publications were distributed in Czechoslovakia by the solidarity committees and enjoyed wide popularity.

A glorious page in the combat history of the Czechoslovak volunteers in Spain was their participation in August-September in the Aragon offensive, especially in the battles to liberate Quinto and Belchite.

In the meantime, far from Aragon in the southern theatre of operations at Córdoba, the Májek Battery was heroically repulsing an enemy onslaught. In the unequal ten-day battle of Los Blasques, all the guns were destroyed, and the men had to fight their way out of enemy encirclement.

Also in the south in the winter of 1937/38, the 129th International Brigade was formed out of the Djaković, Dimitrov and Masaryk battalions. It saw its first action in the spring of that year in Levante, where its task was to hold back the advance of fascist forces to the Mediterranean Sea.

After the fascists succeeded in dividing the territory of the Spanish Republic into two parts, the 129th Brigade was the only one of the International Brigades to remain in the Central-Southern zone, where it became part of the Levante Front. Also located there were the international Gottwald Battery, under the command of Laco Holdoš, one of the first Czechoslovak volunteers in Spain; the Májek Battery and the Liebknecht Battery, whose commissar was Alexandr Bubeníček, member of the CC CPCz. Bubeníček was killed in action; his replacement was K. Kubín. In the exhausting defensive battles on the Levante Front, the men of the Liebknecht and Gottwald anti-aircraft batteries fought on the same sector of the front as did their comrades from the infantry units. The Gottwalds distinguished themselves in the defence of Sagunto, an important industrial centre of the Republic. For almost two months their guns defended that city and its steel plants, repulsing 51 air raids and downing 10 enemy planes. The battery saw its last action in Valencia, and while it was there, enemy planes did not succeed in damaging a single ship coming to that port.

The participation of Czechoslovak volunteers in the fighting in Spain drew to a close basically with the battles on the Levante





The banner of the Gottwald Battery

Front. Despite the heavy fighting in the mountains and the constant shortage of weapons, ammunition, clothing and food, the men staunchly withstood the onslaught of the well-armed and superior forces of the enemy. In that fighting, the 129th Brigade lost many brave men, both internationalists and Spanish soldiers, who made up two-thirds of its personnel. The 129th Brigade was awarded the Medal of Valour by the Spanish Government. And there is this final fact that speaks eloquently of the fighting qualities of the brigade: The Spanish Government's decree withdrawing all foreign volunteers from action was carried out in Catalonia on September 23-25; however, the 129th Brigade stayed on because the command of the Levante Front considered it impossible to replace it in this sector. It was withdrawn from the front only on October 10.

The news from home was not good in those days. The dark clouds of fascism had gathered over Czechoslovakia. The front pages of the International Brigades' newspaper, *Volunteer of Freedom*, dramatically underscored the fact that the defence of Czechoslovakia was taking place on the fields and mountains of Spain. Their own country's tragedy, the realisation of the impor-

tance of their international mission in Spain, and the deep sense of common ties with the heroic Spanish people, made the Czechoslovak volunteers all the more determined to continue the struggle. They regarded their withdrawal from the fronts and the coming departure from Spain only as a brief breathing spell before new battles against fascism.

The Czechoslovak internationalists were withdrawn from the front to the outskirts of Valencia, and later transferred by sea to the North, to Catalonia. The ruling circles of Czechoslovakia were categorically against the repatriation of the volunteers. Negotiations dragged on and were still in progress when General Franco's and the interventionists' divisions tore into Catalonia. The volunteers decided to return to the front.

Thus, once again a Czechoslovak Battalion, consisting of about 450 men, and an artillery battery came into being. At the village of Llagostera, not far from Gerona, the Czechoslovak volunteers joined their last battle with the fascists on Spanish soil. After firing their last cartridges fighting off the advance guard of an Italian division, they retreated into France. No one knows how many Czechs and Slovaks were killed in that action. Among them, however, were former men of the Jan Žižka Machine-Gun Company Pavel Antoš and Kagan; Jan Eisner and Stanislav Krejčí were captured by the fascists. In the two and a half years of the war in Spain, more than 400 Czechoslovak volunteers lost their lives.

On March 15, 1939, Czechia was annexed by fascist Germany. A puppet clerical-fascist government was set up in Slovakia. Soon the fascist occupation embraced almost all of Europe. All the thoughts of the Czechoslovak anti-fascists were directed towards further struggle with the sworn enemy.

Despite the years of heavy fighting in Republican Spain and the moral and physical suffering endured in concentration camps after evacuation from Spain, the Czechoslovak international brigades, never losing their steadfastness and resolve, again took up arms to fight against fascism. They fought in partisan detachments on their native soil, in Czechoslovak units formed in France and England, in detachments of the Resistance in occupied France, and in the Chinese National Liberation Army. Those of them who managed to get to the Soviet Union took part in the liberation of their country in the ranks of the Czechoslovak Corps under the command of Ludvik Svoboda. In the post-war years, the Czech and Slovak veterans of the International Brigades were in the first ranks of the selfless builders of their people's socialist Czechoslovakia.

Decades have passed since the time that the Spanish people put up their heroic resistance to fascist aggression, since the days of that unparalleled international movement of solidarity of



which the International Brigades were part. But the events of those years and their lessons have not been forgotten. Klement Gottwald was perfectly right when in 1937 he wrote to the Czechoslovak volunteers in Spain: "You are writing pages into the history of the peoples of our country which future generations will be proud of."

## FINLAND

Finland in the 1930s was more like a fascist than a bourgeois-democratic state. The social and political life of the country was dominated by organisations with marked chauvinistic, fascist leanings: the para-military Suojeluskuntalaiset, the Lotta Svärd women's organisation, the Academic Karelian Society, the Patriotic National Movement, and others.

Official representation of the working class was monopolised by the Social-Democratic Party, then controlled by a Right-wing reactionary leadership. The party's position was strengthened by harsh government repression of all Left working-class organisations.

Finland's 100,000-strong revolutionary trade-union organisation was disbanded in 1932, while the Communist Party had been outlawed from the moment it was founded in 1918. The upsurge of the anti-fascist movement in Europe after German fascism came to power was also felt in Finland, stimulating a nation-wide discussion of the question of a united workers' and people's front. Some legal possibilities even opened up for the Left forces to work for peace and democracy and against war and fascism.

The events in Spain following the fascist revolt enhanced these new trends in the political life of Finland. Although the bourgeois press presented a distorted picture of the situation depicting the government of the Spanish Republic as despotic, and the reactionary revolt as a national liberation movement, Finnish workers were nonetheless able to grasp the real meaning of those events thanks largely to the efforts of the Communists and certain progressive magazines. Workers were everywhere discussing the latest news from Spain and collecting money for the Spanish people. Local Social-Democratic organisations where Left elements were in the majority collected contributions and arranged lectures and concerts in behalf of the Spanish Republic. At the initiative of its chairman, Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi, the Social-Democratic Women's Union organised aid to Spanish children. However, the Social-



Democratic leadership, fearing the growing influence of Left elements in the workers' movement, tried to inhibit all mass forms of solidarity. The Women's Union conducted its collection campaign as a neutral, charity project. Moreover, it avoided publicity and tried to keep people with Left views from active participation in it. The Finnish Committee for Aid to Spanish Children sent 100,000 francs, as well as food and clothing, to Spain through the International Committee in Paris.

The only political force in the country to work vigorously and consistently for all-round assistance to the Spanish Republic was the Communist Party. Its attempts to create a united front of all democratic forces were continually hampered by the leadership of the Social-Democratic Party. Although denied the right to use the press and verbal propaganda and agitation, the Communist Party nonetheless worked hard to turn the aid-to-Spain campaign into a broad public movement and to connect it with the movement for a united Popular Front.

High on the list of measures taken by the Communist Party to support the Spanish Republic was its selection and dispatching of volunteers. The Comintern's appeal found favourable response in Finland; there were many who were ready and willing to take up arms to stop fascism. But the government repression and the fact that the Party had to operate underground prevented the movement from assuming mass proportions.

The government used the pretext of Finland's "neutrality" to prohibit volunteers from leaving Finland, and the political police kept a vigilant eye out for violations of the ban. It required great resourcefulness on the part of the volunteers and organisers to avoid police surveillance. Anyone caught trying to leave for Republican Spain could be tried on charges of "intention to commit treason". Any worker expressing a desire to leave the country was suspected of intentions to join the International Brigade and was subjected to stern questioning. Most left the country by illegal means.

The volunteers preferred the route via Sweden. They travelled singly and often without money to the assembly point in Stockholm, from where they usually proceeded in groups by sea to France.

Overcoming obstacles connected with their lack of documents and their unfamiliarity with the language, and running into French gendarmes as they crossed the Pyrenees, or the fascists in the Mediterranean between Murcia and Barcelona (as was the case, for example, with the Spanish Republican merchant ship, the *Ciudad de Barcelona*, which the fascists torpedoed on May 30, 1937), the volunteers ultimately reached Spain.

Of the 300 to 350 Finnish volunteers, about 60 came directly from Finland, primarily from Helsinki, Vyborg, Turku, Pietar-



Finnish volunteers at Albacete, July 1937

saari and Kemi. The others came from countries like the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union and Sweden, to which they had earlier emigrated. Seamen made a considerable group. Most were workers, the youngest of whom was 16, and the oldest 40. Some had gone through military service in the Finnish army, while others had either taken part in the Finnish civil war of 1918, the Russian civil war, or in the First World War. Most of the volunteers who came from Finland were Communists, but there were also some Social-Democrats and some who belonged to no party. Differences in political views, however, did not interfere with the militant camaraderie of the volunteers in the ranks of the International Brigades.

Finnish volunteers began arriving in Spain in groups in the beginning of 1937. Prior to that a few had come singly from other countries. One of the first was Tuure Lehén, a Communist who came from the USSR. In September 1936, he was in Madrid in the ranks of the famous 5th Regiment, training soldiers of the People's Militia. Later he was in Albacete helping to organise the International Brigades, and since the spring of 1937 he was an instructor in the international and Spanish formations.

When the Finnish volunteers began arriving in Spain, they were assigned to various units of the International Brigades, which made it difficult for those who knew no other language but Finnish. Later, in the course of the war, it became possible to bring



Finns together, primarily into units of the 15th International Brigade. In the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of that brigade, a machine-gun company, named after Jaakko Ilkka (leader of the Finnish peasant uprising of 1597-98), was formed and placed under the command of Captain Niilo Mäkelä, a Finn from Canada. Among the other commanders in the battalion were Finns from the United States, Canada and Finland. Finns also served in the machine-gun company of the Lincoln-Washington Battalion of that same brigade, one machine-gun platoon of which was named after the Finnish revolutionary, Toivo Antikainen. About 20 Finns fought in the 11th International Brigade. Small groups of Finns served in rifle companies, guerrilla detachments, the artillery and various army services and medical units.

The combat history of the Finnish volunteers began in February 1937, when in the ranks of the 11th International Brigade Finns took part in repulsing an insurgent offensive at the Jarama river. Next, Finnish machine-gunners took part in the fighting against Italian interventionists near Guadalajara. There, machine-gunner Paavo Pajunen fought with outstanding courage as in the course of the battle he replaced the wounded M. G. platoon commander, Henry Mäki, a Finn from Canada.

The Toivo Antikainen M. G. Platoon, commanded by Niilo Kruth, a Finn from the U.S.A., saw its first action in the Brunete operation in July 1937. In command of machine-gun teams were the Finns, Toivo Suni from Canada, Henry Bushka from the U.S.A. and Frans Pakkala from Finland. Finns participated in the attacks and counter-attacks at Villanueva de la Cañada and at Mosquito Crest, where they suffered their first casualties in killed and wounded. Sergeant Suni's machine-gun group distinguished itself in the fighting to repulse an attack by the Moroccan cavalry.

But the largest and most difficult military operation in which the bravery, steadfastness and fighting qualities of the Finnish volunteers were displayed in full measure was the retreat of the troops of the Eastern (Aragon) Front in March and April 1938. On March 9, the insurgents and interventionists suddenly attacked the Republican troops with several infantry corps supported by tanks after devastating artillery and aerial barrage. The Republicans hastily retreated. Their communications were cut, and a wide breach was made in their line of defence. The job of closing the breach, into which four enemy divisions were pouring, was assigned to three incomplete International Brigades of the 35th Division. The forces were too uneven, and the most the internationalists could do was to try to prevent the enemy's motorised columns, which were now moving fast over every road towards the Republican rear, from surrounding them. The men of the 35th Division selflessly repulsed the enemy wherever the locality permitted.

At that time, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion almost always acted as the 15th Brigade's rear-guard. Time after time, units of the battalion, and above all the machine-gun company, clashed with fascist troops pressing in from the rear and the flanks. The constant skirmishes with the enemy and the latter's frequent air attacks, during which the roads were bombed and strafed, disrupted the Republican columns, caused units to become confused, and took a heavy toll in lives.

On its very first day on the front, on March 10, after an all-night march, the Canadian Battalion ran into advanced detachments of the Italian Black Arrows and Blue Arrows divisions. The machine-gun company took up convenient positions on a hill north of the village of Azuara, near Belchite. The platoon under the command of Henry Bushka dug in on the northern slope and Lt. Gunnar Ebb's (Paavo Koskinen's) platoon, on the southern. Skilled machine-gunners Kauko Nihtilä, the Finnish sailor who had distinguished himself in the battle of the Jarama, Villi Pääkkö and Sergeant Toivo Suni, hero of the battle of Brunete, had their machine-guns trained on the two roads to Lécerá over which the enemy was trying to break through to the 15th Brigade's rear. The hill was bombarded by fascist artillery and bombed from the air. Among those killed was Yrjö Kyyny, a Finnish volunteer from Canada. But the machine-gunners kept up their fire throughout the day.

At nightfall, the battalion was ordered to retreat to new positions beyond the Aguas river, two kilometres from its former line. They dug trenches all the night. At that place, the only highway to Lécerá passed through a gorge, which provided a good vantage point for keeping the entire area occupied by the fascists under



Paavo Koskinen (Gunnar Ebb)



fire. A group of machine-gunners was positioned on the top of a sheer and nearly inaccessible cliff directly above the highway.

At daybreak, the superior enemy forces renewed their offensive, but were met with heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. At that moment, the battalion received orders from the divisional command to retreat in the direction of Lécera, and immediately began carrying them out. But the order never reached the machine-gun group on the cliff: the messengers had been killed. After covering the withdrawal of their comrades-in-arms, the men on the cliff kept up the fight to their last cartridge, whereupon they were surrounded and brutally murdered by the fascists. Among those brave internationalists were Group Commander Nihtilä, Platoon Commander Bushka, Commissar Aarne Mynttinen, and machine-gunner Villi Pääkkö.

In the meantime, fighting was going on south of Belchite, where the 11th Brigade's infantry and a Finnish machine-gun group, in which Eero Lojander served, were caught in an encirclement. Italian tanks had blocked the group's retreat route. Putting up a fierce fight, the machine-gunners helped their unit break out of the encirclement, but by then they themselves were cut off and lost all contact with the other units of their brigade. Only upon reaching Híjar were they able to rejoin the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

As it retreated towards Lécera, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion's machine-gun company learned that the fascists had already occupied the town and that the only road leading from it to Albalate was under enemy artillery fire. There was only one way out—to bypass Lécera and to reach Albalate in a roundabout way. Late in the evening of March 12, after travelling by country roads, hunted down by fascist planes, and having lost contact with the Brigade HQ, the men of the Canadian Battalion came out onto the highway about two kilometres from Albalate. The commander of the machine-gunners, Gunnar Ebb (Paavo Koskinen), had orders from the division commander, General Walter (Swierczewski), to set up a line of defence. But in a few hours the order was given to continue retreating towards Híjar, because the enemy, flanking the brigade on the right, was approaching that town. Under heavy enemy fire, the machine-gunners drove headlong through Híjar, now enveloped in flames, and came out onto the road leading to Alcañiz. The other units of the Canadian Battalion were forced to turn off the highway and to move towards Alcañiz in roundabout ways, often losing contact with each other.

Six kilometres from the city, a Republican artillery battery, without infantry cover, bombarded the advancing fascists. Then the commander of the Ilkka M. G. Company, Captain Mäkelä, ordered his men to take up defensive positions on the closest hills.

Coming up to join the company at that point were riflemen from the 15th Brigade and machine-gunners from the Lincoln Battalion who had lost contact with their units. Thus a composite detachment was formed, consisting of a group of heavy machine-guns with Finnish machine-gunners Eero Hautojärvi and Lojander, a group of light machine-guns under the command of Asser Mantere (also a Finn), a rifle unit and one tank. This detachment, headed by Ebb (Koskinen), joined battle with two squadrons of the Moroccan cavalry and thwarted their attempt to flank the Republican column on the left.

Ebb's detachment held its position for a day and a half, but when on the morning of March 15 it became known that the fascists had accomplished the flanking manoeuvre and taken Alcañiz, the detachment moved northward, taking back roads, in the direction of Caspe. Towards evening the soldiers were already engaging the enemy at the approaches to Caspe, the first town along the six-day line of retreat that had not yet been taken by the enemy. The composite units of the 15th and 11th International brigades, 1,200 men in all, took up defensive positions on the hills west of Caspe.

For two days the internationalists put up a stubborn fight against the fascist Navarre Division which was advancing against them with the support of 30 guns and 30 tanks. The first enemy attacks were repulsed. In the afternoon of March 16, the fascists, bringing in fresh reinforcements, succeeded in breaking through to the town, but the internationalists, with the help of units of the 14th Brigade that had come up in the meantime, threw them back. Casualties in the battle at Caspe included Aulis Taivanen, killed, and M. G. Company Commander Mäkelä and Platoon Commander Hugo Lehtovirta, both mortally wounded. Machine-gunners Eero Hautojärvi, Eero Lojander, Asser Mantere and Olavi Ohman distinguished themselves in the fighting, as did Kaarlo Siskonen, who knocked out an enemy tank with a hand grenade.

On the night of March 16, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, along with the entire 15th Brigade, was withdrawn to an area around Batea for rest and reinforcement. But the breathing spell was not long-lived. In the last days of March the battalion was again in the thick of battle, this time countering a renewed fascist attack at Gandesa. A rifle company under the command of I. Päiviö, a Finn from Canada, along with Ebb's machine-gun platoon which was attached to it, took up a position by the Calaceite-Gandesa road east of the river Algas. Another detachment, under the command of Henry Mäki, was reinforced with the machine-gun teams of Walter Forsman, Asser Mantere and Tauno Hermans. Its job was to occupy positions at the Algas along the Batea-Maella highway. At dawn, Päiviö's detachment was attacked and



surrounded by units of the Italian division, and in the uneven battle Päiviö was captured. Hautojärvi's machine-gun group, occupying a separate position, held off enemy tanks trying to break through to Gandesa. By nightfall, however, they had used up all their ammunition, whereupon they withdrew through a ravine to the crossroads leading from Batea to Calaceite.

Mäki's detachment, in the meantime, which was fighting between Batea and the River Algas, was forced to retreat to avoid being surrounded. But even so, the fascists succeeded in encircling Tauno Hermans' machine-gun team. All the men, including Team Commander Hermans and orderly Syvert Virtanen from Helsinki, were killed.

In the beginning of April the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, together with the entire 15th Brigade, was pulled back for regrouping and reinforcement. The ordeals of the March retreat had not shaken the morale of the Finnish internationalists; they were all eager to get back into action. In the course of reorganising the Canadian Battalion, Finnish volunteer Frank Rogers was appointed commissar, Henry Mäki, commander of the second company, and Gunnar Ebb, commander of the machine-gun company.

In the summer of 1938, the Finnish volunteers took part in their last action—the Republican Army's drive to the Ebro. On the night of July 24, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion took up initial positions for making a forced crossing of the river in a sector between Flix and Ascó. Ebb's machine-gun company moved at the head of the battalion. At 5 hours 40 minutes the machine-gun groups climbed into the boats and the crossing began. The first to reach the opposite shore of the Ebro was Hautojärvi's machine-gun group.

A substantial role in the battalion's successful crossing was played by the sailors found among the Finnish volunteers, men who were excellent rowers. A correspondent for the American newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, wrote in glowing terms about the feats of sailor Kaarlo Siskonen, Boris Karlenius, a leader of Canadian unemployed Walsh Castello, and Tauno Erkkilä during the crossing which proceeded under continual artillery fire and attacks from the air. Olavi Suhonen was killed and Tauno Erkkilä was wounded.

As soon as it reached the other side, the machine-gun company was caught in the enemy's artillery fire. The battalion suffered casualties in killed and wounded, among whom were some Finns. The enemy battery was neutralised only after the battalion had advanced five or six kilometres into the territory occupied by the fascists. The sudden strike by the Republican forces caught the fascists unawares. Many surrendered, and the battery that was bombarding the battalion was captured.

Towards morning on the following day, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion reached the outskirts of Corbera. The men, who all this time were wearing alpargatos (Spanish sandals), had barely time enough to get leather shoes from captured fascist supply depots when the town was subjected to heavy bombing that lasted all day and night. The battalion was ordered to quit the burning city and to head for the road going south from Gandesa. There, enemy resistance was particularly fierce.

The machine-gun company was given the task of advancing to the south of Gandesa. Walter Forsman's team, which was in the lead, got caught in a heavy cross fire. Forsman was mortally wounded, and machine-gunner Sulo Tourunen, from Canada, was killed. The major obstacle to the advance was Hill 368, held and fortified by the fascists. The fighting for this hill went on for three weeks, but because of the lack of artillery it was unsuccessful. Among those who fell in these battles was the activist in the Communist Party of Finland, Kalle Manninen, and the machine-gun company's messenger, Arvi Myllykangas, who came from Canada.

After being pulled back for a few days' rest, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion was sent into the Sierra Pandols south of Gandesa to replace units of the glorious 11th Division. The positions there were on bare cliffs, with no possibility of digging in, and there was no water available anywhere nearby. Shell, mine and bomb splinters took a heavy toll in casualties. The bombardment continued for days on end. It was there that Arvi Mikkolo was killed and Eero Hautojärvi and Kaarlo Siskonen were wounded.

After heavy, exhausting battles, the men of the battalion, tortured by heat and thirst, were withdrawn. But soon they were taking part in a new offensive northeast of Gandesa, in the Sierra Caballs. Just before the offensive, the battalion commander fell ill, and Captain Ebb was appointed in his place. Ebb's command of the machine-gun company was given to Karl Syvänen, a Finn from the U.S.A. who had taken part in the Brunete operation.

On September 21, after a short rest, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion returned to its former positions to repulse a major offensive begun by the fascists. Fascist infantry and tanks, moving on in the wake of a heavy artillery barrage, squeezed off the battalion's right flank. At the same time, the fascists cut off the battalion from neighbouring units on the left. Trapped in a pocket, the battalion began a fighting retreat. M. G. Company Commander Henry Mäki from the U.S.A. was wounded, and the machine-gunner Viljo Siltanen from Canada was mortally wounded. This was the battalion's and the Finnish volunteers' last battle. The Spanish Republican Government issued a decree withdrawing the International Brigades from the front.





Eino Laakso (Walter From)

Two-thirds of the Finnish anti-fascists who had served in the battalion returned home. The remainder were either killed in action or murdered by the fascists after being captured. Those of the volunteers who survived remember with affection and respect their comrades-in-arms who gave their lives for the freedom of Spain.

In the first half of 1937, the Republican Command had begun forming small guerrilla detachments to be sent into action in the enemy's rear. They were made up primarily of Spaniards, but some internationalist volunteers were also accepted into their ranks. A group of Finnish volunteers was among them.

A guerrilla detachment usually operated in the fascists' rear for three or four days, and then returned through the front lines, using local inhabitants as guides. The guerrillas were armed with light machine-guns, submachine-guns, Mausers, hand grenades, and mines that worked on a flash-light battery. The favourite weapon of the Finns was the submachine-gun, since it was very convenient in close combat. There was a shortage of weapons, and they had to be gotten mostly from captured fascist arms depots.

In western Andalucía a guerrilla detachment, which included five Finns, used an estate near Blazquez as an assembly point. From there the guerrillas would go out in groups to make raids along the Azuaga-Peñarroya sector. In one of their operations they blew up an enemy train carrying fascist troops from Puelonuevo to Bélmez. Republicans keeping an eye out for the train from observation points in the hills reported that many fascists were killed in the explosion. In operations such as this, the explosives were usually placed by the Finns, Onni Hukkinen and Kallas Laakso.

At the height of the fighting for Peñarroya in the spring of 1937, a 100-man strong guerrilla detachment, which included eight Finns, penetrated to the fascists' rear and blew up their headquarters. At Ovejo, five Finns took part in a guerrilla attack on a fascist caravan in which four lorries with foodstuffs were

destroyed. In a railway tunnel, that same detachment blew up a train carrying Italian soldiers.

Six Finns were sent from a base in Jaén to join a guerrilla detachment operating in the Segovia-Ávila area. During the Brunete operation, this detachment, under the command of Ebb, kept the enemy's communications under constant harassment. Among the Finns there were Reino Keto and Yrjö Korpi from Canada.

Another guerrilla detachment, this one under the command of Lieutenant Eino Laakso, was sent to the mountain village of Lanteira in the Sierra Nevada. Operating from positions atop Mulhaén peak, the guerrillas made raids into enemy territory. The fighting went on there for two months, in the course of which the guerrillas blew up a hotel located on the slope of Mulhaén peak, in which high-ranking officers of the fascist army were quartered. Eino Laakso's detachment accomplished raids on Guadix, just outside Granada, in Granada itself, and along the road to Malaga. During one of their sudden attacks, in which the Swede, Venberg, and the Finn, Vattulainen (both of whom were ultimately killed in Spain) took part, the guerrillas succeeded in freeing 200 prisoners of war.

Four Finns served as miners in a guerrilla detachment that operated in the Broto-Fiscal (Upper Aragon) sector from their base in Boltaña. Near Jaci a troop train was blown up, a mission in which Liimatainen and Hukkinen took part along with their Spanish comrades.

During the battle of Belchite, the guerrillas, seven Finns among them, were very active, continually harassing the enemy's troops and supply transport. In those operations Kallas Laakso and Ahti Lassila displayed outstanding courage and daring. Kallas Laakso, for example, burst into a room in which there were 20 fascists and destroyed them all with a burst of machine-gun fire.

The Finnish volunteers fought valiantly and selflessly in the first big battle against the fascists in Europe. Their feat still serves as an inspiring example to all democrats and anti-fascists in Finland.



## FRANCE

The broad democratic movement in France had scored great victories by 1936. The resolute rebuff given by French workers to the attempted fascist coup in February 1934 had demonstrated that fascism was neither inevitable, as some people were saying, nor an invincible force. Communists, Socialists and Radicals united in the anti-fascist struggle. The proposals for united action advanced by the French Communist Party, but initially rejected by the Socialists, finally received a favourable response, and on July 27, 1934, representatives of both parties signed a pact. In October of that year, Maurice Thorez proposed on behalf of the Communist Party that, to countervail reaction and fascism, a Popular Front of Liberty, Labour and Peace be established<sup>1</sup>—a broad popular movement based on the alliance of all proletarian and democratic forces. The idea soon gained mass support.

The formation of a broad Popular Front was also enhanced by the fact that joining the Communist and Socialist parties was the party of the Radicals, which had a great deal of influence among the middle strata and which had, on July 14, 1935, taken part in joint demonstrations by thousands of working people demanding the formation of a new, democratic government.

Adding their voice to this demand were many outstanding members of the French intelligentsia, who had united in the Paris Anti-Fascist Committee of Action and Vigilance: Paul Langevin, Romain Rolland, Jean Perrin, Frederic Joliot, Paul Rivet, Henri Wallon, Jean-Richard Bloch, André Malraux, Jean Cassou, Louis Aragon, Henri Barbusse, Marcel Cachin, Paul Vaillant-Couturier and many others.

At the same time, the working class repulsed an offensive by the capitalists, who had been encouraged by decrees issued by Laval's

<sup>1</sup> *The Comintern and Its Revolutionary Traditions*, Moscow, 1969, p. 88 (in Russian).

government reducing wages of government employees and cutting expenditures on social insurance. The number of strikes against the wage cuts and the number of "hunger marches" by the unemployed rapidly grew.

An important stage in mobilising and strengthening the unity of the working class was the merger in March 1936 of two major trade-union associations—the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire and the Confédération Générale du Travail—to form a single organisation to be known as the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). Two months later, the Popular Front won a victory in the parliamentary elections. The Communist, Socialist and Radical parties won a total of 337 of the 559 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The result was the formation of the first Popular Front government under the Socialist Léon Blum. The working class, now fully conscious of its strength, began a vigorous struggle against low wages, unemployment and violation of trade-union rights by employers. As a result of the powerful strike movement, employers were forced to sign the Matignon Agreements with the trade unions, in which a number of concessions were made to the working people: substantial wage increases, a 40-hour week, a two-week paid vacation, and a commitment to respect the rights of trade unions.

However, the French bourgeoisie, forced to retreat under the pressure of the workers' movement, was determined to get its revenge at any price. The trusts refused to honour the Matignon Agreements, disorganised production and undermined the value of the franc. They openly supported fascist groups, financed their newspapers, and brazenly lauded nazism. Under their pressure, the government, on March 7, 1936, embarked on the road of encouraging fascist aggression by failing to take any retaliatory action in response to the German occupation of the Rhineland and refusing to apply sanctions against Italy, as proposed by the League of Nations in connection with Mussolini's predatory war against Ethiopia.

Such was the situation in France at the time that the Spanish generals instigated a mutiny against the Republican Government.

The working people of France were full of admiration for the heroism of the Spanish people fighting to defend the Republic. In 1934 they displayed their solidarity with the fighters in Asturias, and followed with great sympathy the upsurge of the workers' movement in Spain which had developed at the same time as the French movement for a Popular Front victory. Now, in July 1936, it became clear to many Frenchmen that the revolt of the fascist generals, organised with the blessings of Hitler and Mussolini, posed a threat not only to the Spanish people, but to the security of France. For in the event of a fascist victory in Spain, to two borders with fascist states—Germany and Italy—a third would



be added—in the Pyrenees. The words of Manuel Azaña, President of the Spanish Republic—"In defending Madrid on the heights of the Guadarrama, we are at the same time defending Paris"—found deep understanding in France.

The newspaper, *L'Humanité*, on whose pages Marcel Cachin, Gabriel Péri, Paul Vaillant-Couturier appeared, and the newspaper, *Ce Soir*, on which Louis Aragon and Jean-Richard Bloch worked, waged a relentless campaign for aid to the Spanish people. On August 27, 1936, *L'Humanité* published an article by the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, in which he demanded that the Spanish Government be given "the possibility of freely procuring airplanes, guns and ammunition in France". The article ended with a warning that the solution of this question had important meaning not only for Spain but also for the future of the peoples of Europe. "Tomorrow it will be in Czechoslovakia that Hitler will throw his agents against the Republican authorities. Tomorrow the same thing may happen in Rumania, where the Iron Guards, paid by Hitler, have been activated. The same may happen to Yugoslavia. The same may happen to Belgium. Tomorrow it may happen to France herself!"

The great French writer, Romain Rolland, addressed an impassioned appeal to all the peoples of the world:

"Humanity! Humanity! I call upon you! I call upon you, the people of Europe and America! Help Spain! Help ourselves! Help yourselves! It's you, it's all of us who are menaced!"<sup>1</sup>

Many other French writers and journalists were ardent supporters of Republican Spain. Among them were André Viollis, Georges Bernanos, Georges Soria, Simone Téry, André Wurmser, Madeleine Braun, André Malraux, François Mauriac, Paul Claudel, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and also Louis Delaprée and Gerda Taro, both of whom were later killed in Spain while working there as correspondents for French newspapers.

The national interests of France and the anti-fascist programme of the Popular Front demanded giving the legitimate government of Spain immediate aid. Insisting on this was the French Communist Party, the CGT, the Left wing of the Socialist Party, headed by Jean Zyromski, and all consistent democrats.

However, as early as July 25, 1936, Léon Blum decided to pursue a policy of "strict neutrality", and under this pretext, in violation of agreements signed previously, banned the export of arms to Spain and proposed to other powers that they do the same. Two days earlier, he had gone to London with his foreign minister, Yvon Delbos, where he easily acceded to demands by British conservative circles who were advocating an agreement

<sup>1</sup> *L'Humanité*, November 22, 1936.

with Germany and Italy. On his return to France, Blum came out flatly against rendering aid to the Spanish people. Influential French big business circles, in turn, pushed the government towards a policy of betraying the Spanish democratic republic. On August 1, Blum proposed that all major European powers collectively adopt the principle of "non-intervention" in the affairs of Spain. Despite the clear violations by Hitler, Mussolini and Salazar of the "non-intervention" agreement, the Blum government and subsequent French governments pursued this policy right up to February 27, 1939, the day that France and Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic and recognised the government of General Franco.

The policy of "non-intervention"—which in fact encouraged fascist aggression—was instrumental in the disintegration of the Popular Front, in whose ranks a fierce struggle took place between the advocates of aid to the Spanish people and supporters of the government's policy of appeasing fascism. The constant concessions made by the French Government to fascism and big capital created favourable conditions for a new offensive by the reactionary forces. Under pressure from the big bourgeoisie, the government in February 1937 suspended the implementation of economic and social reforms called for in the Popular Front programme. This so-called breathing spell proclaimed by Blum's government and supported by the Socialist and Radical parties, undermined the militant spirit of the working people and helped the big bourgeoisie to launch its counter-offensive.

In June 1937, instead of taking decisive action against the trusts, the government resigned. The government of Radicals Chautemps and Daladier which replaced it continued and stiffened the policy of attacking the economic and political rights of the popular masses, to the extent that in 1938, on the basis of "emergency powers", it liquidated the main gains won by the working class in 1935. At the same time, the policy of "non-intervention" turned more and more into open encouragement of the Hitlerite aggression in Spain and into compact with the fascist states.

In those years of fierce class battles, victories and defeats for the French working people, an outstanding place in the political struggle of the working class and of the popular masses belonged to the broad movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, which the French working people had launched at the very beginning of the fascist revolt. The people demanded that arms and food be sent to the Republic and that the policy of "non-intervention" be abandoned.

On September 3, 1936, at a mass meeting in the Paris Winter Cycle Track, Dolores Ibarruri said: "We are defending the cause of liberty and of peace. We need planes and cannon for our struggle. . . . We need arms to defend liberty and peace! And do





This money went to buy medicines for Spain

not forget—let no one forget!—that while it is our lot to resist fascist aggression today, the struggle is not going to end in Spain!" The slogan, "Planes and Cannon for Spain!" advanced at that meeting of 40,000 working people was enthusiastically picked up on the following day during a huge demonstration at the Place de la République in Paris, and then throughout the country.

At the initiative of the French Communist Party, the CGT and the French section of the IRA, numerous organisations were formed: the Committee for Aid to Refugees from Northern Spain, the Committee of Solidarity with the Spanish People, the Committee for the Care of Spanish Children, the Committee for Aid to Families of French Volunteers in the International Brigades, the National Committee of Women and Girls of France. Aid to Republican Spain was expressed in tens of millions of francs and in thousands of tons of goods. The Young Women's Alliance of France, for example, collected 300,000 tins of condensed milk for Spanish children; the French section of the IRA collected 24,000,000 francs and, together with the trade unions, organised the work of sending all contributions to Spain. They invited 10,000 Spanish children to France and arranged for them to stay with French families, thus saving them from bombings by fascist airplanes and the privations of war time. In November

1936, a CGT congress proposed that all CGT members be assessed an hour's wages monthly for the Aid Spain fund.

Paris was the headquarters of the International Committee for Co-ordinating Aid to Republican Spain. Its honorary presidium included such outstanding figures as physicist Paul Langevin, writer Jean-Richard Bloch, Francis Jourdain, Marcel Cachin, Jean Longuet, Jean Zyromski, Pierre Cot, Edouard Herriot and others. Also in Paris was the International Medical Centre, uniting anti-fascist doctors of the most diverse political convictions. With the active participation of Dr Pierre Rouquès and his colleagues, the Centre organised the collection and shipment of medicines and medical equipment to Spain. It also formed teams of volunteer doctors, surgeons and nurses to serve in the medical services of the International Brigades.

Solidarity with the Spanish people manifested itself in many different ways. Workers in the aircraft industry, for example, caught up the national slogan, "Planes for Spain!", and were prepared to work extra time without pay. Another example was the setting-up of a company called France Navigation to ensure sea shipping to Spain despite the blockade and "non-intervention".

But the most brilliant and unparalleled page in the history of French democracy's solidarity with the Spanish people was written by the French volunteers who took a direct part in the armed struggle against fascism. The movement began on the personal initiative of French anti-fascists, acting alone or in small groups, who felt that the fascist menace must be thwarted. But soon the French Communist Party gave the movement an organised form. As a result, 8,500 French anti-fascists—not only Communists, but also Socialists, syndicalists and non-party people—were given the opportunity of going to Spain to fight in the ranks of the Republican Army.

Despite the fact that the French Government and the Non-Intervention Committee sought to turn the Franco-Spanish border into an insurmountable barrier, France, due to the efforts and help of the French Communist Party, became a bridge to Spain for many thousands of volunteers from all over the world.

At the very outset of the fascist revolt, many Spanish emigrant workers living in France returned home to defend their native country from fascism. And with them came their friends—French workers and anti-fascist emigrants from other countries. In Barcelona they met with athletes who had come in July 1936 to the People's Olympiad, and in the first days of the revolt took part in the fighting in the Catalan capital. These were the first volunteers. Some of them fought in the North, defending Irún, others saw action on the island of Mallorca, where the heroic battles of the Republican landing force ended in a forced retreat and evacuation of the island because of insufficient arms and ammuni-



tion. The foreign volunteers who survived the battle of Irún retreated into France, but again crossed the border to form the Paris Commune Centuria in Barcelona. The centuria went to Madrid, was reinforced with new volunteers from France, and took part in the fighting under the command of Jules Dumont, a former officer of the French Army.

In October, when by decree of the government, the Republic began forming a regular army, the men of the Paris Commune Centuria became part of the first regular battalion (which was given the same glorious name) made up of French and Belgian volunteers. Jules Dumont and Commissar Pierre Rebière headed the Paris Commune Battalion, which along with the other battalions of the 11th International Brigade—the German Edgar André Battalion and the Polish Dabrowski Battalion—arrived at the front on November 8 to help the heroic people of Madrid repulse a violent fascist assault on the city.

French volunteers coming to Spain in the autumn and winter of 1936/37 formed several other battalions that became part of various International Brigades: the Franco-Belgian André Marty Battalion of the 12th Brigade; the Henri Vuillemin Battalion and the Franco-Belgian Louise Michel Battalion of the 13th Brigade; the 10th (Domingo Germinal) Battalion, 12th (Franco-English) Battalion, and 13th (Henri Barbusse) Battalion of the 14th Brigade; and the Sixth of February Battalion of the 15th Brigade. In addition to this, French volunteers were also in the ranks of the engineer troops, in the cavalry, the tank units, and in various anti-aircraft and field artillery units. The international artillery battery of the Anna Pauker Battalion was commanded by Gaston Carré, and its political commissar was Paul Richard.

There were also Frenchmen among the many pilots who fought against Franco's air force. Some of them were in the España Squadron, under the command of the famous French writer, André Malraux. French volunteers served as drivers of military vehicles, worked on vehicle repairs at the plant in Albacete, and served in the First Transport Regiment of the 5th Army Corps. Many French doctors, doctor's assistants and nurses fought for the lives of the men of the Republican Army in mobile field hospitals at the front and in stationary medical installations in the rear.

The postal service of the International Brigades, with its centre in Albacete, was organised by Jean Grandel, former General Secretary of the French Postal Workers' Union.

The French volunteers represented all of the political trends included in the Popular Front. The largest contingent was made up of Communists and non-party men who sympathised with them. A considerably smaller number were members of the Socialist and Radical Socialist parties. Among the Socialists (former participants in the French Popular Front) who fought in the ranks of the In-



Captain Jacquot (centre) and Marcel Sagnier (right). February 1937



French volunteers of the 10th Battalion of the 14th Brigade on the Jarama. February 1937



ternational Brigades were battalion commanders Major Fort and Major Bernard (shot in 1944 by the nazis for taking part in the Resistance movement), Major Agard (in the artillery) and Major Gabriel Hubert.

The French Communists in Spain were headed by members of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party André Marty, François Billoux and Henri Janin. Léon Mauvais and Cathala regularly fulfilled party assignments. In the spring of 1937, a group of 30 men, all members of the Central and regional committees of the Alliance of the Communist Youth of France, came to reinforce the cadres of the International Brigades. Among them were Louis Perrot, who was later killed in action in 1938; Jean Hemmen and Lafond, who were later shot during the nazi occupation; Henri Tanguy, who became commissar of the 14th Brigade; and Charles Escure and André Gregoire, the latter becoming a battalion commander in the 12th Brigade. Leaders of the French Communist Party, including Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos, Marcel Cachin, Eugène Hénaf, and Florimond Bonte, made frequent trips to Spain to meet with the men of the International Brigades and inspire them to further struggle against the fascists.

People of different generations fought in the ranks of the International Brigades: veterans of the 1914-18 world war and former participants in the colonial wars in Morocco, Syria and Indochina; somewhat younger men who had only recently come out of the service; and finally, some very young men, such as 17-year-old Pierre Georges (Fabien), who was later to become a hero of the French Resistance of 1940-45. However, neither differences in age or nationality, nor differences in views or social origin prevented them from understanding each other and fighting together against the common enemy.

On November 6, 1936, the fascists came up to the gates of Madrid. The city was subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. On the evening of November 8, the volunteers of the Paris Commune Battalion occupied positions for a counter-attack in a suburban park, Casa de Campo, on the west bank of the Manzanares river. This was where the main thrust of the fascist storm columns—Moroccans and mercenaries of the Foreign Legion—was directed.

In the first battles on the Manzanares, in the sector between the San Fernando Bridge and the French Bridge, the internationalists suffered heavy casualties. The second company of the Paris Commune Battalion lost two-thirds of its men, and only thanks to the fact that the Edgar André Battalion joined the battle in time was the enemy assault repulsed. A week later, the 11th Brigade received orders to counter-attack the Foreign Legion and Moroccan units which had broken through to the University City on November 15 and 16. There the men of the Paris Commune Battalion and Asturian demolition men, the "dinamiteros", recap-

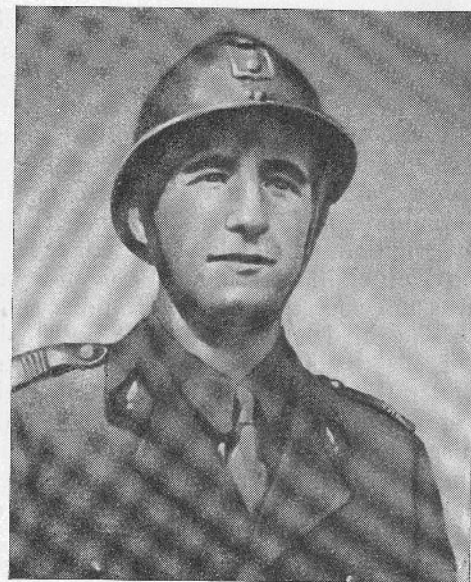
tured the buildings of the faculties of philosophy, literature, pharmacology and medicine.

In the meantime, at the approaches to the capital, the Franco-Belgian Battalion, together with the Garibaldi and Thaelmann battalions of the 12th International Brigade, launched an attack, with tank support, against the fortified Cerro de los Angeles hill south of Madrid. This operation weakened the insurgents' onslaught on the Manzanares. A few days later, the 12th Brigade also moved into the University City. In the several days of heavy fighting in the second

half of November in the University City and in the Casa de Campo, the internationalists of the 11th and 12th brigades, together with Spanish "milicianos" and regular units of the Republican Army, repulsed the violent attacks of the enemy and depleted his shock columns.

In December 1936 and January 1937, when the insurgents changed the direction of their thrusts, both of these brigades took part in the fighting west of Madrid at Boadilla del Monte. It was there that the commander of the Franco-Belgian Battalion, Bernard, was wounded. At Majadahonda, volunteers fought jointly with the battalions of the militia—"Asturias", the 1st Madrid and "Pacífico", and the 3rd (José Galán) Brigade, and took part in the defence of the northwestern sector of Madrid, which included Villanueva del Pardillo, Las Rosas, Pozuelo de Alarcón, Humera and Aravaca. The Paris Commune Battalion came under heavy bombardment, but did not retreat. Battalion Commander Jules Dumont was wounded, Marcel Sanier took his place. The Thaelmann Battalion, in which about 100 Frenchmen fought side by side with their German comrades, held its positions at a high price—out of 600 men, only 32 survived.

Also taking part in the fighting on the northwestern sector in the defence of Madrid were the men of the 14th International Brigade. Made up primarily of French volunteers, this brigade was



Colonel Fabien (Pierre Georges)



sent in December 1936 into Andalucía to stop the advance of a large enemy force that had broken through the Republican front. After fulfilling this mission, the brigade was transferred to Madrid, to a sector of the front where the fate of the capital was being decided for the second time. As before, the insurgents failed to achieve their main objective. They could not take Madrid.

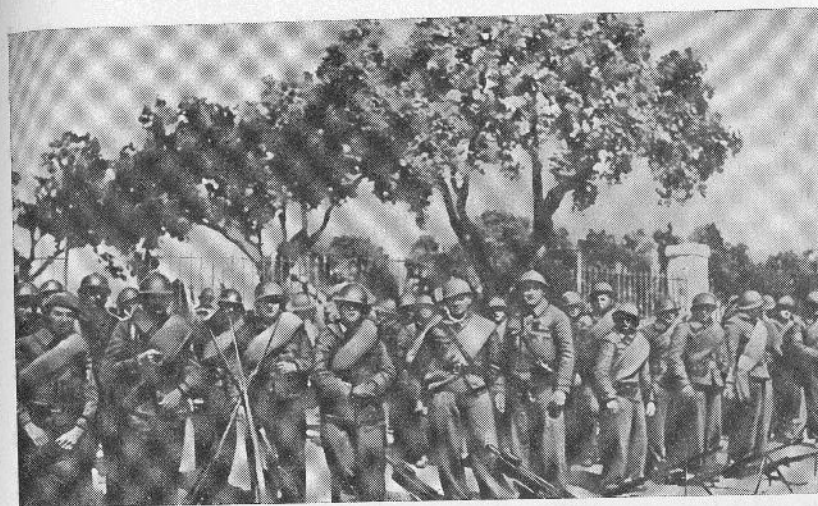
At the time when this decisive fighting was going on, two battalions of French and Belgian volunteers, as part of the 13th International Brigade, were engaged in the Republican offensive on Teruel in December 1936 and January 1937. The operation was not successful, the battalions suffering heavy casualties.

The third large battle for Madrid began in February 1937, on the east bank of the Jarama. It lasted for three weeks, during which the best formations of the Republican Army, including four International Brigades, each with battalions of French volunteers, displayed remarkable steadfastness and heroism. The hopes of the insurgent generals to take Madrid were shattered once again. It was on the Jarama that volunteers of the Franco-Belgian Sixth of February Battalion of the newly formed 15th International Brigade saw their first action.

The casualty figures tell the story of the fierceness of the battle of the Jarama and the steadfastness of the volunteers: of the 800 men of the Sixth of February Battalion who had come to the Jarama positions, only 150 remained in action after ten days of fighting. Similar large losses were incurred by other battalions of the 15th and 11th brigades, which repulsed the fascist advance at Morata de Tajuña, the main objective of the enemy attacks in those days. Most of the commanders of the sub-units of these brigades were killed or wounded. Large losses were also suffered by units of the 12th (André Marty) Brigade, which prevented the enemy from reaching his second objective—the village of Arganda on the Madrid-Valencia highway. One company of this battalion, protecting the Pindoque Bridge, was suddenly attacked by Moroccans at night and completely wiped out. Another company, which was sent in to close the breach, also suffered heavy losses.

When at the end of February the front began to stabilise, the International Brigades, exhausted from constant battles, were in sore need of rest and reinforcement. But there was no time for this: in March, a fresh fascist offensive began.

In the first days of March, an expeditionary corps of Italian fascists under the command of General Roatta (Mancini) suddenly went over to the offensive. Two International Brigades—the 11th and 12th—were the first Republican units to whom the command of the Madrid Front assigned the task of blocking the road to the interventionists. In the evening of March 9, the Paris Commune Battalion and the entire 11th Brigade arrived at the Zaragoza highway east of Guadalajara. In the preceding two days the



French and German volunteers of the 10th Battalion of the 14th Brigade.  
Madrid, March 1937

enemy had advanced 25 kilometres. Engaging the enemy in battle, the volunteers forced the fascists to stop and deploy their troops. On the next day, the 12th Brigade came up and blocked the highway leading to Brihuega. Conducting a defensive battle and slowly retreating under the onslaught of three enemy divisions, the volunteers of the 11th and 12th brigades gave the high command a chance to win time and concentrate larger forces. In two days' time, the internationalists, together with the Spanish brigades of the 11th Division, went over to a counter-attack. The Paris Commune Battalion seized the fortified point of Casa del Cobo, while the André Marty Battalion of the 12th Brigade took part in storming and seizing another key position—Palacio de Ibarra. On March 18, the anniversary of the Paris Commune—the Republicans went over to the offensive along the entire front, putting four of Mussolini's divisions to flight.

The men of the Republican Army, exhausted from the heavy fighting, understood what great international significance their success had, and rejoiced at the victory won.

A few weeks later, as part of the reorganisation of the International Brigades along language lines, the Paris Commune Battalion was transferred from the 11th Brigade to the 14th, in which French and Belgian volunteers were brought together. In the village of Ciruelas near Guadalajara, a touching farewell took place between the French and German internationalists from the Thaelmann and Edgar André battalions.



The 14th International Brigade, which from then on was called the Marseillaise Brigade, had as its commander Jules Dumont, and its commissar was François Vittori. It consisted of four international battalions, commanded by the Frenchmen, Marcel Sagnier, Boris Guimpel and Grignier, and the Englishman, George Nathan, the latter to be later replaced by the Algerian, Rabah Oussidoum. The 5th Battalion of the brigade consisted of Spaniards only. Like all International Brigades, the 14th reinforced its ranks not only with newly arrived internationalists, but also with Spaniards, who by the summer of 1938 made up nearly 85 per cent of its personnel.

After the reorganisation, French volunteers still remained in battalions of the 13th, 15th and 150th brigades, but subsequently they too were transferred to the 14th (Marseillaise) Brigade.

From May 29 through June 3, 1937, the 14th Brigade of the 35th Division, together with the 31st and 69th Spanish brigades, took part in an offensive in the Sierra de Guadarrama area. They attacked Balsain at night and waged stubborn battles against the enemy's fortified position at Cerro del Puerto. The aim of this operation was to create a threat to the city of Segovia, and thus relieve the situation of the Republican forces on the Northern Front, at Bilbao. "The 14th Brigade... at Segovia deserves high praise for its heroic action in the battle of Balsain,"<sup>1</sup> wrote the commander of the 35th Division, General Walter. In the course of this operation, Battalion Commander Boris Guimpel was wounded, and his replacement, Captain Rasquin, a Belgian, was killed.

In July 1937, the Republicans launched a big offensive at Brunete, in which many French volunteers took part. These were men in the Henri Vuillemin Battalion; the Sixth of February Battalion, under the command of Gabriel Fort who had returned to service after being seriously wounded on the Jarama; and the André Marty Battalion, under the command of Emile Boursier (deputy commanders, Fernand Belino and François Ruiz). There were also Frenchmen in the Anna Pauker Artillery Battalion, which supported the Republican troops during attacks against Villanueva de la Cañada. In that operation, Fernand Belino was seriously wounded, and Gabriel Fort lost his sight as a result of a serious head wound.

In October 1937, the 14th Brigade took part in the big defensive battle of Cuesta de la Reina, south of Madrid. The fighting there was extremely heavy. In three days, the brigade lost more than 1,000 men in killed and wounded. Dying the death of the brave were company commanders Aurèle Vittori and René Angel, captains Clerc and Louis Boujard, commissars Francisco Terroba and Blondeau. Among the wounded was Battalion Commander

<sup>1</sup> *Istorichesky Arkhiv*, No. 2, 1962, p. 188.



The banner of the 14th Brigade

Rabah Oussidoum. But the enemy's attempt to break through the Republican front was frustrated.

In March 1938, the fascists undertook a major offensive in Aragon, an operation in which they used five army corps, including an Italian corps supported by many tanks, artillery (up to 600 guns) and air power (600 airplanes). In an attempt to close the breach made by the enemy in the first days of the offensive, the Republican Command brought in reserve Spanish units and five International Brigades. By March 12, however, the International Brigades of the 35th Division were almost completely encircled by four enemy divisions in the Híjar-Alcañiz-Ebro sector. Only after extremely heavy and difficult fighting to repulse fascist attacks from the front and flanks, did they succeed in breaking out of the encirclement. On March 15, the fascists broke into Caspe, but a battalion of the 14th Brigade, the 45th Division, moved up in time to throw them back.

Emile Boursier's battalion moved to the outskirts of Caspe in a series of counter-attacks. The commander of the 14th Brigade,



Marcel Sagnier, took command of a force made up of his own brigade, two battalions of the 12th Brigade, one Spanish battalion and two batteries. For 24 hours the group waged a stubborn battle for Caspe against the fascist Navarre Division, but threatened with complete encirclement, it retreated on the night of March 16, taking up positions at the Guadalupe river. Commissar Haudecoeur, a member of the Central Committee of the French Young Communist League, arrived at the front from Albacete at the head of a new French battalion, the Vaillant-Couturier Battalion, which immediately went into action. However, despite the remarkable feats of heroism performed by the volunteers and other Republican units, the enemy forces pushed through to the Mediterranean, cutting off Catalonia from the rest of Republican Spain. Many French volunteers fell in these battles, including Rabah Oussidoum and Gabriel Hubert, who was seriously wounded. Commissar Haudecoeur successfully avoided capture when, with grenade in hand, he broke through a group of fascist soldiers.

The heavy casualties suffered by the Republican troops during their retreat on the Eastern Front did not break their fighting spirit. In less than three months, the Republican Army would accomplish the most daring of all operations in the war—the crossing of the river Ebro and the deep breakthrough of the enemy front.

The 14th Brigade played an important part in this operation. Its task was to divert the enemy by crossing the Ebro near Amposta—a point far from the place where the main Republican forces were preparing to cross. This operation, which took place on the night of July 24, was an unforgettable episode in the war, and one in which the men of the Paris Commune Battalion displayed outstanding courage and valour. First an advance team swam silently across the river under the cover of darkness, showered the enemy trenches with grenades and captured them. Then the rest of the battalion crossed the river on boats and rafts, now under heavy enemy fire. They fought their way deep into enemy defences for several hundred metres. The fascist command, finally realising what was happening, concentrated its artillery fire on the river, thereby preventing the other units of the brigade from crossing.

For a day the Paris Commune Battalion stalwartly repulsed attack after attack by the large enemy forces, mainly Moroccans who were supported by both artillery and tanks. By the end of the day, having lost more than three-fourths of its men and almost all of its officers, the battalion, on orders from the command, and under heavy enemy fire, crossed over to the left bank. In this phase of the operation, Battalion Commander Cazala and Commissar Lopez were killed. But the 14th Brigade had accomplished its mission. By drawing considerable enemy forces to itself, it



The Certificate of Honour the Spanish Government presented to members of the International Brigades leaving for home

ensured the successful crossing of the river by units of the 5th Corps of the Ebro Army.

Beginning on September 8, French volunteers took part in the second phase of Operation Ebro, in the defensive battles to hold the territory liberated from the fascists. In the number of artillery pieces, airplanes, tanks and other military equipment used by the enemy, these battles surpassed all previous operations of the Spanish war. From the day that the 14th Brigade occupied positions on the heights of Sierra Caballs till September 23, when the foreign volunteers were withdrawn from action by a government decree, attacks by the enemy and counter-attacks by the Republicans did not cease for a single day. The commander of the Paris Commune Battalion (which had been reorganised and reinforced after the battle of July 25), Captain Roll, his commissar, and René Hamon, commissar of the Henri Barbusse Battalion, were killed.

On the last day of action, September 23, the 14th Brigade found itself in a particularly grave situation. A storm of artillery and machine-gun fire forced Republican units to retreat, and the command posts of the 14th Brigade and the 45th Division suddenly turned out to be in the main line of resistance. Brigade Commander Marcel Sagnier and Commissar Tanguy led a counter-attack, as a result of which the brigade re-established its former positions, and the fascists, who had already hoisted their flag on the hill where the brigade C.P. was located, were sent running.



Thus, the French volunteers waged their last battle with fascism on the Spanish soil with flying colours.

It was with heavy heart that the French volunteers parted with their Spanish brothers with whom they had fought for two years in battles that had already then decided the fate of Europe. And it was with great emotion that just before their departure from Spain they listened to an address by Vice-President of the Cortes of the Republic, Dolores Ibarruri, in which she expressed the profound gratitude and unbounded love of the Spanish people.

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Once the Spanish war was over, the French Government began to round up soldiers of the Republican Army and foreign volunteers of the International Brigades and to confine them to concentration camps. All former French volunteers considered it their sacred duty to launch a broad campaign to help their comrades-in-arms who were being held in camps at Gurs, Vernet, St Cyprien and elsewhere, and also the hundreds of thousands of Spanish refugees—men, women and children—who had been driven into camps guarded by the police and gendarmes. The betrayal of Spanish democracy by the Western powers soon bore its bitter fruit. The policy of “non-intervention”, after a series of capitulations to fascism, led to the shameful Munich agreement, then to the partition of the Czechoslovak Republic, Austria’s loss of independence, and finally to the Second World War.

Less than one year after the return of the French volunteers to their homeland, they again became soldiers, ready to defend France from her enemy, fascist Germany. When, as a result of the inability and unwillingness of the French bourgeoisie and the army high command to offer resistance, Hitler’s troops occupied France virtually without a fight, the veterans of the International Brigades showed up in the front ranks of the Resistance, in the forefront of the fight for their country’s freedom.

In September 1940, former commissar of the Paris Commune Battalion and member of the CC FCP, Pierre Rebière, headed the anti-fascist struggle in five departments of Central France, showing himself to be an able and courageous leader. Later, in the rank of Lt. Colonel, he was appointed member of the National War Committee. In October 1942, Rebière was captured by the nazis, subjected to brutal torture, and shot.

Pierre Georges, who had been one of the youngest volunteers in the Spanish war, became almost a legendary figure in the French Resistance. Even before Hitler’s troops invaded France, he was thrown into a camp for his anti-fascist activities. He escaped and immediately began organising groups of young anti-fascists around Marseille. Later, under the name of Fabien, he became

one of the founders and leaders of the French organisation of francs tireurs and guerrillas. In 1941 he gave the signal for the beginning of armed resistance to the occupation by assassinating a nazi officer in Paris. During the fighting to liberate Paris, Pierre Georges headed a large formation called the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) of the Resistance. At the head of the first Paris Brigade which he formed, he took part in the pursuit of the retreating Hitlerite troops to the very Rhine. Pierre Georges was killed in December 1944 on the Alsace Front, together with Pimpeau, the former commissar of the international battalion in which he fought in Spain.

The former commissar of the 14th International Brigade, Tanguy, began organising Resistance committees in the Paris area as early as 1940, and in 1941 he joined the ranks of the franc tireur and guerrilla organisation. Among his fighting comrades were former Battalion Commissar Haudecoeur, former major in the artillery in Spain Carré, and former participants in the Spanish war Epstein and Georges Vallet. From 1941 through 1944, Tanguy held various command posts in the franc tireur and guerrilla organisation. In June 1944, he took command of the FFI of the Isle de France province. On August 25, 1944, Colonel Rol-Tanguy, together with General Leclerc, received the capitulation of General von Choltiz and the German garrison of Greater Paris.

François Vittori, former commissar of the 45th International Division, organised the Resistance movement on Corsica, and later directed the liberation of the island.

Doctor Pierre Rouquès, former chief of the medical service of the International Brigades, together with other veterans of the Spanish war—Dr Reboul, Dr Chrétien and his assistant, Fanny Bré—organised the medical service of the Resistance. They hid wounded francs tireurs and guerrillas and gave them medical attention.

André Breton, Fernand Belino, Honoré Galli, Yvonne Robert and many others joined the ranks of the Resistance fighters from the first days of the occupation. Even those who came back from Spain wounded or sick, as for example, the author of this article, also took part in the struggle by doing such things as writing leaflets and setting up communications between the participants of the Resistance.

Colonel Jules Dumont, organiser of the first armed anti-fascist groups, was arrested and shot by the Hitlerites. The Spanish war veteran Tourné, who was one of the leaders of the Resistance in the Lyons region, was seriously wounded and remained an invalid for the rest of his life. One of the leaders of the FFI, Boris Guimpel, together with Gaudefroy, led operations against the fascists in the southern part of the country. Jacquet represented the National Committee of Francs Tireurs and Guerrillas in the



headquarters of the French Armed Forces. Louis Blesy in Provence, and Delcamp in Toulouse, commanded units of francs tireurs and guerrillas. Spanish war veterans Taddée Oppmann, Jean Baillet, Appere, Fongarnard, Jean Hemmen, Just Héras, Lafond, Carre, Schmidt, Champion and Bessières were, along with Beaulieu, Clouet, Lemaitre, Cotille and many others, among the organisers of the first armed Resistance groups. Many were killed in action, shot, locked up in prisons, or taken to Germany and thrown into concentration camps. Among these were Grandel, Jean Cathala (the Hitlerites guillotined him), Marcel Langer, Epstein, Hapiot, and Georges Vallet.

Even in the gaols the struggle went on. For example, veterans of International Brigades Bernard, Marc Perrin, Henri Neveu and Jourdan were in the forefront of a prisoner revolt in the central gaol at Eisses. After the revolt was suppressed, Bernard was shot. In the liberation of the Buchenwald death camp, former international brigade officers Belino and Lagunas formed two companies out of prisoners who had risen up against their executioners.

Former French volunteers in Spain often fought shoulder to shoulder with Spanish comrades in the ranks of the Resistance movement. Many soldiers and officers of the Spanish Republican Army who had to retreat into France ended up in concentration camps and so-called work companies. During the fascist occupation thousands of them joined francs tireurs and guerrillas and fought heroically side by side with Polish, Italian, German, Jewish, Hungarian and other former international brigaders who had also, in one way or another, gotten out of concentration camps. The names of Christino García, hero of the French Resistance who was shot in Spain by the Franco police in 1946 along with eleven other Spaniards who had fought for the freedom of the French people; General Evaristo Luis Fernandez, commander of the first formation of Spanish guerrillas in France; Celestino Alfonso and the 23 heroes of Manusian's group, among whom were five veterans of the International Brigades—all symbolised the indissoluble brotherhood-in-arms that had for all time united the fighting men of Republican Spain and the fighting men of the French Resistance in the common battle against fascism and for the freedom of all peoples.

After the victory over fascism in May 1945, the veterans of the International Brigades formed their own association. *L'Amicale des anciens volontaires français en Espagne republicaine (AVER)*. By that time, of the 8,500 Frenchmen who had left France to fight in the International Brigades, 3,000 had been killed on the fields of battle in Spain, and another 3,000 had perished fighting in the Resistance or in nazi concentration camps.

From the first days of its existence, the AVER set about organis-



The unveiling of a monument to heroes of the International Brigades at the Eaubonne Cemetery

ing a broad programme of material aid to the many French veterans of the Spanish war who had come back sick or disabled and were still receiving no help whatever from the state. The AVER received help in this complex undertaking from trade-union organisations, municipalities headed by members of Left parties, the French Popular Aid Society (*Le Secours Populaire Français*), the IRA and numerous local Spanish war veterans' associations both in France and in the socialist countries.

The former volunteers in the Spanish war still feel profound respect and sympathy for the Spanish people, and in many ways continue to express solidarity with the tens of thousands of Republican soldiers who were forced after Franco's victory to seek refuge in France. Many of these emigrants have married and now have families of their own; they take part in the French democratic and anti-fascist movement. In the beginning of the 1950s, during the most difficult period of the cold war when successive reactionary French governments persecuted Spanish anti-fascists living in France, who as a rule had fought in the Resistance, the AVER, together with all democratic organisations, waged an extensive campaign of protest against their arrests and expulsion from France. The AVER also came out against the brutal repressions in fascist Spain, and was one of the organisers of mass meetings of protest against the murder of Julian Grimau. In recent years, the AVER has been taking an active part in international



meetings in defence of the Spanish people and demanding amnesty for political prisoners.

There are not many veterans of the International Brigades still alive today, but they are always among the first to show a readiness to resist whenever fascism again tries to raise its head. During the attempted counter-revolutionary coup in Hungary in 1956, fascist groups in France, protected by the police, made a raid on the editorial offices of the newspaper, *L'Humanité*, and tried to set fire to the building. Former Spanish war volunteers were in the forefront of the popular demonstration that upset the plans of the fascists. During that confrontation two workers were killed, and one of them, Ferrand, was a veteran of the Spanish war. In exactly the same way, during the war in Algeria, when the fascists tried to accomplish a coup d'état and visited bloody reprisals upon democrats, former Spanish war veterans again fought in the ranks of the working class against fascism. In February 1962, during an anti-fascist demonstration in Paris, nine persons were killed by the police, and Fernand Belino, the President of the AVER, was seriously wounded.

Today, the surviving veterans of the Spanish war, although much older, have not withdrawn from the struggle. On the contrary, their long experience has made them into tempered and courageous fighters for democracy, for peace, for a better life for the working people. Many of them are eminent political and public figures, such as, for example, François Billous, member of the Political Bureau of the CC FCP; Henri Rol-Tanguy, member of the CC FCP; André Tourné, former deputy of parliament and now president of the Republican Association of War Veterans; Fernand Belino, general councillor of the Department of Seine, and the AVER Chairman; André Gregoire, Mayor of Montreuil-sur-Seine, a large suburb of Paris; Honoré Galli, one of the directors of the France-Spain Association. Former Resistance fighters Gaudefroy, Blesy and Rol-Tanguy are on the board of the National Association of the Veterans of the French Resistance.

The veterans of the International Brigades remain true to the ideal for which they and their fighting comrades spilled their blood in the ranks of the Spanish Republican Army.

## GERMANY

The Popular Front victory in the elections to the Spanish Cortes in February 1936 alarmed the German monopoly bourgeoisie. German imperialism at once gave its backing to the Spanish reactionaries, who, after recovering from their first fright, set about organising a military conspiracy against the Democratic Republic. Hitler wanted a fascist Spain not only because the German military and monopolies sought control of that country's mineral wealth, particularly her strategic raw materials. That had been their goal earlier. German capital had begun penetrating the Iberian Peninsula at the turn of the century and by the mid-1930s it had seized a considerable portion of the Spanish production of zinc, copper, silver and mercury. But with the establishment of a regime in Spain subservient to Berlin German imperialism would complete the strategic encirclement of France and be in a position to threaten the sea lanes linking Britain with her colonies. As conceived by the nazis, Spain would be a bridgehead in a future war for domination in Europe. Further, the nazis feared that a strong Popular Front regime in Southwestern Europe would inevitably foster the growth of anti-fascist forces in other European countries, including Germany.

Hardly a month passed after the February elections than *Pravda*, the central newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reported that the notorious Spanish monarchist General Sanjurjo was in Berlin negotiating for aid to the counter-revolutionary military organisations in Spain that were again plotting against the government.<sup>1</sup> This report was fully consistent with the facts. Hitler, Goering and representatives of Metall-AG, one of the largest monopolies, promised Sanjurjo German assistance for a counter-revolutionary revolt.

The smoothly functioning nazi machine in Spain was put into high gear. In Madrid the German General Faupel was Hitler's

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, March 12, 1936.



liaison man with the Spanish conspirators. When the rising started Admiral Canaris, the chief of the German military intelligence, made sure that General Franco was put in command of the revolt in place of Sanjurjo, who died in an air crash. On July 27, 1936 the nazis sent 20 Junkers-52 transports to Morocco to help Franco rush troops to the south of Spain and thereby avert the destruction of the isolated centres of the revolt during the first days of the civil war.

In 1939, recalling this first act of open intervention in Spain, the nazi Air General Sperrle, who commanded the Condor Legion in 1936-37, said: "Within a few days German pilots airlifted by J-52s 15,000 Foreign Legionnaires and Moroccan troops and also military equipment to Jerez."<sup>1</sup> German warships, including the torpedo-boat *Leopard*, escorted transports that carried insurgent troops and military equipment from Africa. The nazi intervention in Spain mounted with the spread of the war.

On July 25, after armed workers and loyal troops had crushed the fascist revolt in Madrid, Barcelona and other cities, Karl Schwendemann, counsellor of the German Embassy in Madrid, telegraphed to Berlin: "Unless something unforeseen happens, it is hardly to be expected that in view of all this the military revolt can succeed."<sup>2</sup> These words contained not only alarm and a sober assessment of the situation but also a plea for assistance for the Spanish putschists. This SOS signal was heard in Berlin. The secret "Sonderstab W", which took charge of the organisation of direct military intervention in Spain, was set up on Hitler's orders. On July 31, 1936, six days after the receipt of the SOS signal, the nazi General Milch sent the first units of the Condor Legion to Spain. Dressed in civilian clothes, army pilots secretly sailed to Cádiz in the S. S. *Usaramo*, whose holds carried aircraft, bombs and anti-aircraft guns.

This and all subsequent acts of intervention were doggedly denied by the German authorities. In August, when Franco already had most of the Condor Legion and German military supplies, Dr Bielfeld, the German chargé d'affaires in London, glibly assured the British Foreign Office that Germany was giving no assistance to the insurgent Spanish generals, that she had not and would not send them military supplies.

At the Nuremberg trial, Hermann Goering, chief of the nazi Air Force, admitted: "With the permission of the Führer, I sent (to Spain.—*Ed.*) a large part of my transport fleet and a number of experimental fighter units, bombers, and anti-aircraft guns. . . . In order that the personnel, too, might gather a certain amount

of experience, I saw to it that there was a continuous flow, that is, that new people were constantly being sent and others recalled."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the fascist-led revolt started, the real, people's Germany sided with Republican Spain. Led by the brutally persecuted Communist Party, which operated deep underground, the working class and other democratic and progressive elements went to the assistance of the Spanish people. "We admire the courage of the fighters for a free and happy Spain, against fascist barbarism,"<sup>2</sup> the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany wrote in a telegram to the Spanish Government.

When the German intervention in Spain had become a fact, the CC CPG declared that solidarity and the struggle of Germans who opposed Hitler for the freedom of Spain were not only a manifestation of proletarian internationalism but the national duty of every German patriot, for the only way to save the German people from the threat of another world war was to defend the Spanish Republic. In a document of the CC CPG of November 26, 1936 it was stated: "Hitler's role as the chief warmonger in Europe and in the whole world places with us, German anti-fascists, an immense responsibility. We have to do everything we can to help smash Hitler in Spain. For this there are two ways: direct assistance to the Spanish freedom fighters and a broad movement of the people in Germany."<sup>3</sup>

Speaking to the German people over Radio Barcelona on December 20, 1936, Walter Ulbricht, member of the Political Bureau of the CC CPG, outlined a programme of struggle against the Hitler regime. His concluding words were: "Honour and glory to the Spanish fighters, who have gallantly defended Madrid against the enemy! Honour and glory to the International Brigades, the Thaelmann, Edgar André and Chapayev battalions that stood their ground at Madrid with the battle-cry 'The fascists shall not pass!' We shall pass. We shall defeat Hitler and Franco at Madrid in the name of peace, liberty and democracy."

The new conditions of the anti-fascist struggle created by Hitler's intervention in Spain and the international movement of solidarity with the Spanish people thus added a new content to the programme for the overthrow of the Hitler regime and to the Popular Front policy that had been charted at the Brussels Conference of the CPG in October 1935. The heroic resistance of the Spanish people and the participation of German volunteers in the fighting in Spain raised the morale of the anti-fascists in Germany

<sup>1</sup> *Die Wehrmacht*, May 30, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series D (1937-1945), Vol. III, Germany and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Washington, 1950, p. 13.

<sup>1</sup> *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, Vol. IX, 1947*, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Freiheitskampf des spanischen Volkes und die internationale Solidarität*, Berlin, 1956, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte*, Berlin, 1965, Vol. 1.



and stimulated the fortitude and confidence of factory, mine and dock workers. On October 18, 1936, the Social-Democratic newspaper *Neuer Vorwärts* carried a banner headline reading "Unrest at the Factories". The German people's indignation was aroused by the sending of German troops to Spain. Protest leaflets were circulated in Duisburg and Düsseldorf in southwestern Germany. In Munich the wives and mothers of soldiers sent to Spain staged a protest demonstration in front of the Nazi party headquarters. Throughout Germany—in Berlin, Bavaria, Silesia, the Rhineland, Saxony and the Ruhr area—action by the workers mounted steadily, and money was collected secretly for Spain. Communists, Social-Democrats and non-party people frequently took joint action urging solidarity with the Spanish people. Many pamphlets containing speeches by Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht and other leaders of the Communist Party were disseminated through underground channels all over the country.

*German Radio Freedom*, founded near Madrid by the German Communists with the help of Spanish comrades, was also an organ of the Committee for the Creation of a German Popular Front. This station, which operated on 29.8 metres, kept the Hitler-enslaved German people abreast of political developments and broadcast practical advice for the illegal anti-fascist organisations. Its guest speakers included Georg Branting, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Arnold Zweig, Ernest Hemingway, Paul Robeson, Frans Masereel and other leading personalities of the German and foreign anti-fascist movement.

There was a quick response in many towns and factories in Germany to the call for a united Popular Front. Communists and Social-Democrats formed Popular Front groups in Berlin, the Saar region and other parts of the country. This was soon brought to the notice of the Gestapo. In a report from Wilhelmshaven it was stated: "The Popular Front idea has certainly caught on among the former members of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (at the navy yard). It is easy to note that in many cases they openly show their sympathy for the Bolsheviks in Spain and hope for their victory."<sup>1</sup>

The successes of the Popular Front in Spain also influenced the attitude of some Social-Democratic leaders—Erich Kuttner, Paul Hertz and Erich Ollenhauer—inducing them to visit the Spanish Republic. They toured the International Brigades and spoke favourably of the Popular Front. Addressing the 11th International Brigade in May 1937, Erich Kuttner said: "We hope that Spain may be and will become the bridge that will reunite the sundered forces of the German proletariat." Paul Hertz, who

<sup>1</sup> *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, ZPA D.F. IX/7, Fond 237.*



Soldiers of the Thaelmann Centuria at Tardienta. August 1936

was a member of the SDPG Executive, subscribed to the united front policy and repeatedly stated his disagreement with the attitude of his party's leadership. In a speech in Madrid on July 4, 1937, Erich Ollenhauer, who represented the Socialist Youth International, spoke in favour of united action and solemnly pledged to work for unity. Regrettably, he soon betrayed his pledge, siding with the enemies of unity between the Socialist and Communist youth of Spain.

The German people's sympathy for the struggle of the Spanish people was evidenced by the growing Gestapo terror. In a single day 70 workers were arrested in Aachen at the Talbot-Waggon-AG and Gerbe und Lohmeyer factories for collecting money for the Spanish Republic. Twenty-one workers of the Aachen power station were sentenced to prison for terms ranging from two to eight years. At the Weser-AG works the Gestapo seized many workers for collecting signatures in support of the Spanish freedom fighters: two of these workers were shot without trial. Large-scale arrests were made by the Gestapo also at the IG Farbenindustrie factories and at the automobile factories in Frankfurt-on-Main. At the close of 1936 it arrested 90 workers of the Adlerwerke in Frankfurt and 40 at the Rödelheim factories, sending many of them to concentration camps. Himmler himself admitted that up to 3,000 persons had been arrested for showing sympathy for the Spanish Republic.



Despite persecution by the Gestapo, active groups of anti-fascists, notably the Communists, did not confine themselves to moral and material support for the Spanish people. They rendered direct support to the Spanish people, organising sabotage at munitions factories and disrupting supplies for the insurgents. Juli Jürgensen, an underground official, reported to the anti-fascist centre in October 1936: "Ships are being loaded at Hamburg. Cranes are filling the holds of vessels with mysterious crates. The work is proceeding day and night. The docks are guarded by the police and the Gestapo. The dockers have found out that this freight is bound for Spain. . . . They know that their brothers are fighting in Spain. Disturbed by the news they are determined to disrupt the loading."<sup>1</sup> In Hamburg and Bremen the seamen and dockers set up a communication system that kept them informed of the movement of military supplies to Spain.

The crews of the ships sailing to Spain informed the branch offices of the International Transport Workers Federation in foreign ports of suspicious freight in their ships. Protest actions were staged on freighters in the second half of 1936 on the initiative of anti-fascist groups. The crews of the German ships *Henrika*, that put in at Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and the *Königstein* refused to transport arms for the insurgents in Spain. The crews of the ships *Melilla*, *Lasbek*, *Poseidon* and *Preussen* went on strike. Each of these actions was followed by arrests and other repressions.

The highest form of aid by the German anti-fascists for the Spanish Republic was their direct participation in the armed struggle against the insurgents. At first this aid was episodic and unorganised. Some German political emigres with Reinhold Hoffmann at their head helped to defend Irun as members of the Republican Militia. Other German anti-fascists, resident in Spain, and Germans who had come for the People's Olympiad (among them were Max Friedemann, Werner Hermlin and Franz Löwenstein) helped to crush the rising in Barcelona. Within a few days, joined by volunteers of other nationalities, they formed the Thaelmann unit of the People's Militia and on July 24 fought their first battle against the fascists near Huesca.

The formation of the Thaelmann International Centuria was started in Barcelona on August 7 on the initiative of the German Communists Hans Beimler, Albert Schreiner, Hermann Geisen and Willi Wille with the assistance of the United Socialist Party of Catalonia.

Meanwhile the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Germany appealed to all German anti-fascists living abroad and

<sup>1</sup> Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, ZPA D.F. IX/7, Fond 237.



The banner presented to the Thaelmann Centuria by the Central Committee of the Catalan United Socialist Party

having military training to place themselves at the disposal of the Spanish Popular Front.

Volunteers arrived in Barcelona from different countries singly and in groups. On August 29, the Thaelmann Centuria was sent to the Aragon Front. Commanded by Albert Schreiner and Hermann Geisen, this unit of over 100 men distinguished itself in the battles at Huesca, Tardienta and Alcubierre.

For the courage and valour displayed by its men, the Thaelmann Centuria was presented with a banner by the Catalan Government. In the course of two months' fighting the centuria lost nearly half of its strength. The first casualties included the German Social-Democrat Wilhelm Pfordt and a young Frenchman named Robert Vigier. Sepp Hirsch, Rudolf Gemmel, Wilhelm Engelmann and many others lost their lives during an assault on a hill near Tardienta.

In the first issue of their newspaper *Die Rote Sturmflagge* on October 15, 1936, the German volunteers wrote: "We are a fighting unit of the German Popular Front. Among us there are Communists, Social-Democrats and non-party men. All are united by the great goal of completely smashing fascism."

A steady stream of freedom volunteers hastened to the assistance of the Spanish people. Most of the German volunteers were political emigres, but many managed to come from Nazi Germany



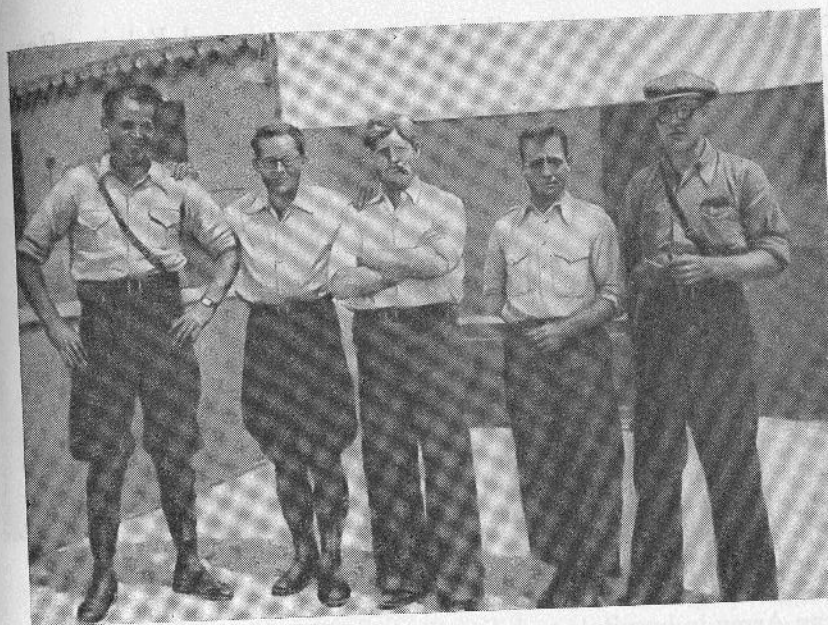
despite the obstacles and the torture chambers of the Gestapo prisons. After untold suffering and humiliation in hard labour prisons and concentration camps they were determined to fight fascism till their last breath.

The German volunteers went to Spain by different and often tortuous roads. The assembly point was in Paris, from where the further transportation to Spain was arranged by the Central Committee of the CPG with the active assistance of the French Communist Party.

During the early stages of the war the volunteers had little difficulty in leaving Paris for Spain in large groups. One of these groups of German volunteers was headed by Gustav Szinda, who was later Chief of Staff of the 11th International Brigade (today he is a Major-General of the National People's Army of the German Democratic Republic), and a worker named Albert Denz, who was a Party official in Hagen. Subsequently, when the French police set up check-points on the frontier with Spain it became much more difficult to send volunteers across the frontier. They now had to go to Perpignan by train, then travel by bus to the foothills of the Pyrenees and cross the frontier by foot along steep mountain trails in order to avoid encountering French frontier guards. Tired but happy in the knowledge that they had reached their destination, they came down the mountains to the fortress of Figueras, where the reception centre for foreign volunteers was situated.

On October 9, 1936, the ship *Ciudad de Barcelona* brought 650 anti-fascists from many countries to Alicante, from where they were sent to Albacete where a headquarters had been set up to organise International Brigades. Among the newly-arrived Germans there were many experienced Party functionaries and activists, including Hans Kahle, Fritz Rettmann, Heinrich Wieland, Josef Zettler, Wilhelm Bahnik, Artur Becker, Christian Wolf, Hermann Gartmann, Richard Gladewitz, Albert Hössler, Heinz Hoffmann, Erich Hoffmann, Gustav Gundelach, Fritz Dickel, Arthur Dorf, Walter Sehlmann, Franz Klamm, Erwin Kramer, Bruno Kühn, Otto Kühne, Erich Mielke, Ewald Munschke, Alfred Neumann, Heinrich Rau, Max Roscher, Gustav Szinda, Karl Thoma (Ernst Blank), Paul Verner, Kurt Hager, Wilhelm Zeisser, Richard Staimer, Richard Stahlmann, George Stibi, Erwin Strohmeier and Hermann Schuldt.

Along with Communists and non-party men there was a small group of Social-Democrats, who included Paul Bergmann, Ernst Braun, Kurt Braun, Kurt Bröttinger, Kurt Garbarini, Hermann Drumm, Herbert Seifert, Hans Martens, Franz Schneider, Paul Feller and Otto Jürgensen. Unlike the evasive official leadership of the German Social-Democratic Party, they joined in the struggle for the Spanish Republic without hesitation.



German guerrilla fighters (second left—Richard Stahlmann)

The volunteers were representatives of all strata of Germany's working population. Intellectuals fought shoulder to shoulder with workers. Many eminent authors, poets, composers, painters and sculptors went to Spain where they placed their talent in the service of the Spanish people. Among them were Willi Bredel, Ernst Busch, Erich Weinert, Walter Gorrish, Peter Kast, Heinz Kiwitz, Hans Marchwitza, Maria von Osten, Ludwig Renn, Bodo Uhse, Eberhard Schmidt, Jeanne Stern and Kurt Stern. The songs written by Erich Weinert and sung by Ernst Busch rallied the international volunteers. To this day they are a revolutionary call in all the countries of the world.

Dedicated German women contributed to the cause of the Spanish people. Among them were the doctors Ursula Aman and Rosa Coutelle, the nurses Elisabeth Bier, Emmy Dörfel, Anni Schmidt and Olla Ewert, the courageous anti-fascists Käthe Wohlrath, Käthe Dahlem, Lotte Möller, Golda Friedemann and Sabine Hager, who worked in the Commissariat for International Brigades or in the editorial offices of radio stations. Young Gerda Taro, a photo-reporter from Leipzig, died in Spain.

Altogether there were nearly 5,000 German volunteers in Spain. Most of them were in the 11th International Brigade that was formed on November 1, 1936. At first the brigade consisted of the Edgar André, Paris Commune and Dabrowski battalions. These



battalions were usually called German, French and Polish, after the nationality of the bulk of the men in them, but in each there were men of different nationalities. For instance, in the Edgar André Battalion, in addition to Germans there were Hungarians, Poles, Frenchmen, Yugoslavs, Englishmen, Czechs, Slovaks and Irishmen. Men of the Thaelmann Centuria, who arrived in Albacete from Catalonia with Hans Beimler, formed the nucleus of the Thaelmann Battalion, which was first part of the 12th International Brigade and then transferred to the 11th. There were German groups and units in the 12th and 13th brigades and in other international units. Franz Dahlem, member and representative of the Central Committee of the CPG and an authorised representative of the Comintern Executive, was a member of the political leadership of the international units from December 1936 onwards.

There were German volunteers in special units of the Republican Army: in a tank brigade, in anti-aircraft and field artillery units, in guerrilla detachments and in transport and medical units. A large group of doctors, among them Walter Blank, Günter Bodeck, Heilbrunn and Feldmann, who gave their lives in the struggle, fought for the lives and health of the men of the Republican Army in hospitals and directly at the firing lines.

The 11th International Brigade engaged the enemy for the first time on November 9, 1936. Confident that the regular units of the Foreign Legion and the Moroccan battalions would have an easy victory over the inexperienced and poorly armed detachments of the People's Militia, the fascists, supported by Nazi and Italian aircraft, tanks and artillery, began the assault of the Spanish Republic's capital in early November 1936.

The International Brigades, welcomed by the people of Madrid, went to the assistance of the capital's heroic defenders. In the Casa de Campo and in the University City volunteers from many countries shed their blood together with the Spanish freedom fighters. In a battle lasting many days the 11th Brigade lost nearly half its strength. Many Germans fell in that battle. The following is only one of the innumerable acts of heroism by the freedom volunteers.

During one of the murderous attacks of the fascists in the University City the commander of a machine-gun team Fritz Dietrich, a metalworker from Wuppertal, went from floor to floor, from window to window of a ruined building, firing his machine-gun at the enemy troops that had surrounded the building. Hand grenades and shells exploded around but he held his ground. When a part of the building collapsed, he dragged his machine-gun out and opened fire at the attacking groups of fascists from the flank. The assault was beaten back. Fritz Dietrich fell in this battle, but the company's positions were saved.



German volunteers arrive at the Madrid Front, November 8, 1936

On December 1, 1936, enemy bullets cut down Hans Beimler and the commander of the Thaelmann Battalion, Franz Vehlou (Louis Schuster). The men who were killed in the first battles at the walls of Madrid included the German Communists Kurt von Appen, Georg Meyer, Paul Baumgarten, Philipp Mayer, Josef Graf, Richard Wagner and Willi Wille, the Social-Democrats Otto Volkmann, Paul Lose and Hans Schwindling and the non-party men Maslow and Karl Katz.

The blood of the fallen cemented the unity of the anti-fascist front that had become a reality in the trenches in Spain. Wide sections of the public in the Spanish Republic saw in the death of Hans Beimler a symbol of the anti-fascist unity and self-sacrifice of the men of the International Brigades. The hero's funeral was attended by hundreds of thousands of people. The poet Rafael Alberti conveyed these feelings of the Spanish people and their grief for the fallen freedom volunteers in a poem entitled *Hans Beimler, Communist and Defender of Madrid*.

In early January 1937 the International Brigades halted an enemy offensive and destroyed two fascist battalions at Villanueva del Pardillo, northwest of Madrid. This victory was followed by a tragic day: in a battle against an overwhelmingly superior enemy force of infantry and tanks on the fringe of a forest at the village of Remis on January 7 the Thaelmann Battalion suffered heavy losses. Only 30 men remained but they held their positions.

During a short rest at Murcia at the close of January, the 11th Brigade, which had lost 1,230 men since November 9, 1936, received





Hans Kahle, Ernest Hemingway, Ludwig Renn and Joris Iwens at the Guadalajara Front. March 1937

replenishments—international volunteers and Spaniards, most of whom were People's Militia volunteers with combat experience. Now almost half of the brigade consisted of Spaniards.

On February 6, 1937 the fascists mounted an offensive with the objective of cutting the Madrid-Arganda-Valencia motor road. The 11th Brigade went into action on February 11. In the difficult conditions caused by the cold weather and the rough terrain it fought a well-armed enemy continuously until February 27. One of the objectives of the furious attacks of the Moroccans and the counter-attacks of the volunteers in the sector of the 11th Brigade was the Casa Blanca, a solitary white house in an olive grove.

Company Commander Ernst Wömpfer and Hermann Drumm, both of the Saar region, distinguished themselves in the fighting for the Casa Blanca. Leading a counter-attack, they fought their way into an enemy trench and silenced a fascist machine-gun with hand grenades. The enemy fled in panic, but the two friends were killed during the pursuit.

A week after the battle of the Jarama, where the insurgents' plan of encircling Madrid from the southeast was wrecked, the 11th Brigade was one of the first units of the Madrid Front to re-engage the fascists. On March 8, 1937, an Italian expeditionary corps consisting of three Italian and a mixed Spanish-Italian division started an offensive in the direction of Guadalajara along the Zaragoza-Madrid highway. At Torija the 11th Brigade joined the

Spanish brigades and the 12th International Brigade, and supported by Soviet volunteers—airmen and tankers—it brought a motorised Italian corps to a halt. The roles were now reversed: the boastful conquerors of defenceless Ethiopia had to go over to the defensive. After bitter fighting at Brihuega, Trijueque and Torija, during which the 11th Brigade alone lost 220 men, the defenders of the Republic mounted an offensive. For the Italian fascists March 18 was a day of catastrophe: for some time their expeditionary corps ceased to exist as a fighting unit.

In Spain nazi Germany committed one crime after another. Aircraft of the Condor Legion reduced two peaceful Basque towns to ashes: Durango on March 31, 1937, and Guernica on April 26. In Durango the raiders killed 248 women, children and old people. In Guernica, which was bombed for three hours, the casualties were 1,654 dead and 889 wounded. On May 31, 1937, the world was shocked by yet another crime: the battleship *Admiral Scheer*, escorted by four torpedo-boats and two submarines, shelled and destroyed the coastal town of Almería. Thousands of people were killed. Expressing the indignation of the German people with the atrocity, Wilhelm Pieck sent a telegram to the Spanish workers on behalf of the Central Committee of the CPG, writing: "We shall redouble our efforts so that the anti-fascist front in Germany . . . in its unrelenting struggle against the brown dictatorship should be worthy of the glorious feats of heroism of the Spanish Popular Front and its gallant Army."<sup>1</sup>

The German volunteers of the 11th Brigade and other international units took part in the first large-scale Republican offensive on the Central Front. The offensive commenced on July 6 and continued until July 28. Fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Spanish and international units, they displayed indomitable courage in the fighting for Brunete, Quijorna and Villanueva del Pardillo. The 11th Brigade alone lost 600 men.

A few days after that offensive all the International Brigades, except the 14th, were rushed to Aragon, where the Republican Command started a major offensive in the direction of Zaragoza. This offensive was spearheaded by Modesto's 5th Army Corps, of which the 11th and 15th International Brigades and the famous 11th Division were a part.

In the sweltering heat the 11th and 15th brigades stormed and liberated the towns of Quinto and Belchite, which had been powerfully fortified by nazi engineers. They captured many prisoners and large quantities of weapons.

Superior skill and courage were displayed by the men of the 11th Brigade in the next major operation of the Republican Army: the defence of Teruel in early 1938.

<sup>1</sup> *Rundschau* (Basel), June 10, 1937, p. 895.





Children from the Thaelmann Orphanage visit German volunteers

"The 11th Brigade," wrote Karol Swierczewski, commander of the 35th Division of which the 11th Brigade was a part, "had a particularly difficult assignment. From January 4 through 14 it fought at a hill named Concud, and then for six days, from January 17 through 22, withstood the furious attacks of the Navarra Division in the vicinity of the El Muleton hill. There . . . the brigade displayed such dauntless self-sacrifice and heroism that the Spanish Command acknowledged that in that period the division had held Teruel, and General Sarabia, commander of the Levante Front, promised to request Barcelona to institute a special badge for the participants in that battle."<sup>1</sup>

In March 1938 when the Franco troops broke through the Aragon Front and the Republican forces began a disorderly retreat, the 11th and other International Brigades and picked Spanish brigades were ordered to contain the assaults of an enemy that was vastly superior in numbers and armaments and thereby enable the front command to bring up the necessary reserves. The brigade carried out this task under extremely difficult conditions: communication with the division and the battalions was frequently broken, and time and again it fought its way out of encirclement, using mountain trails. In less than a month the 11th Brigade lost over a thousand officers and men. After the battle at Gandesa only 80 of the

450 men remained in the Thaelmann Battalion. Among the killed were Artur Becker, Chairman of the Communist Youth League of Germany. Seriously wounded, he was captured by the fascists and executed in Burgos. Also killed were Battalion Commander Wilhelm Pinnecke, Hans Erbe (Fernando), who was personnel department chief at Albacete, and Commissar Wilhelm Glaser (Richard Schenk).

The struggle, which cost so many lives, failed to halt the enemy advance towards the Mediterranean. In early April the 11th Brigade together with the entire 35th Division occupied defensive positions on the left bank of the Ebro, receiving replenishments and reforming their ranks.

The united front of the German Communists and Social-Democrats in the International Brigades was tempered in the flames of battle. On December 14, the Unity Committee of German Communists and Social-Democrats, that was set up in Albacete in November 1937, wrote to the Social-Democratic leadership in Prague and to the Central Committee of the CPG calling for joint action by the leaders of the two parties.

A committee of German workers, consisting of the Social-Democrats and Communists of the 11th Brigade, was formed in February 1938. A conference of German volunteers, held in Valencia on March 13, 1938, adopted a manifesto, in which it was stressed: "We shall win if we are never again split, if we are always united. Then the days of the Hitler dictatorship will be numbered, and together we shall build a free democratic Germany, a Germany of peace, a Germany of freedom, a Germany of prosperity and social reform."<sup>1</sup> Regrettably, the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party remained deaf to the appeals of the anti-fascists of all parties who were fighting in Spain.

The war continued. On July 25, 1938 the Republican Army with the participation of five International Brigades launched one of its biggest operations, the battle on the Ebro. Two army corps under the overall command of Juan Modesto crossed the river at many points under cover of night. Before the enemy could recover from surprise, the battalions of the 11th International Brigade headed by a Scandinavian assault group were on the right bank of the river, and with cries of "Long live the Republic!" they broke into the fortified positions of the fascists and captured the town of Ascó. Within 48 hours the Spanish Republican Army liberated a territory of 600 square kilometres on the right bank of the Ebro.

This was a major victory. The fascists had to halt their offensive on the Levante Front, where their objective was the provin-

<sup>1</sup> *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, ZPA, 3/1/421, Bl. 108-09.*

<sup>1</sup> *Istoricheskoye arkhiv, No. 2, 1962, p. 174.*



cial centre and important port of Valencia. This victory was of immense significance in Spain itself and abroad. It dispersed the assertions of fascist propaganda that the Republican Army was utterly helpless after the catastrophe of March and April on the Eastern Front. Crossing the Ebro and holding the bridgehead on the right bank of the river for three and a half months, the Republicans displayed exceptional valour, courage and will for victory. The command of the insurgents and interventionists concentrated against this bridgehead a powerful artillery force and its entire air force, using a huge quantity of ammunition, showering virtually every metre of the Republican positions with steel. In its counter-offensive it used 15 infantry divisions, including four divisions of the Italian expeditionary corps. But it took them over 100 days of bitter fighting to recover the territory which Modesto's army had captured in two days. For its action in the Ebro operation the 11th Brigade was decorated with the Order of Valour, the highest military award of the Republic.

On September 23, when the fighting on the Ebro was at its height, the Government of the Republic decided to withdraw the volunteers from the front. They left the field of battle with heavy hearts, taking away with them the memory of the touching farewell that was given them by the people of Barcelona.

While some volunteers were returning home and others (including Germans), whose homeland was ruled by tyrannical fascist regimes, remained in demobilisation camps in the north of the Republic, Hitler and Mussolini continued stepping up military supplies to Franco and reinforcing their troops in Spain. On September 30, Chamberlain and Daladier signed a disgraceful agreement with Hitler in Munich, throwing Czechoslovakia into the jaws of the German imperialists. The Munich deal was a heavy blow to the Spanish Republic. Fifth column activities were intensified, and capitulationist feeling mounted among the unstable elements in the Popular Front—the Right-wing Socialists, the bourgeois Republicans, the anarchists, and also among regular officers.

On January 23, 1939, after Catalonia was invaded by a huge Franco army supported by interventionists, the volunteers who had not left Spain requested the Spanish Government to give them the possibility of engaging the fascists in battle again.

Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, fell on January 26. In heavy rearguard fighting the volunteers covered the flow of refugees, who were fleeing to the French frontier. In this fighting the German volunteers again suffered large casualties. Karl Thoma (Ernst Blank), the last German political commissar of the 11th International Brigade was killed. The last roll call of the international brigaders on Spanish soil was held on February 8 and 9. They crossed the French frontier at Perthus and Port-Bou.

Of the 5,000 German anti-fascists who fought in Spain, 3,000



A part of the monument in Berlin to German members of the International Brigades killed in Spain

did not return. They sacrificed their lives for Spain and for a truly democratic Germany. Those who survived continued the struggle wherever life took them.

With the help of French patriots nearly 200 German international brigaders escaped from the concentration camps and the "labour companies". After the Nazi invasion of France they joined the French Resistance. Among them were Otto Kühne, Max Friedemann, Norbert Kugler, Ernst Buschmann, Werner Schwarze, Heinz Priess, Hans Kukowitsch, Kurt Weber, Fritz Fugmann, Max Brings, August Mahnke, Heinrich Schürmann, Walter Vesper and Franz Blume.

Some of the German internationalists were sent to North Africa by the French authorities and held in a camp on the border of the Sahara. Later the Petain Government agreed to turn the internationalists in French concentration camps over to the Nazis. Franz Dahlem and Heinrich Rau were among the first in the Vernet camp to be turned over to the Gestapo. When the Nazis occupied Southern France the Gestapo put many of the Germans who had fought in Spain in concentration camps.



After enormous difficulties some of the German internationalists managed to reach the Soviet Union, where they continued the anti-fascist struggle on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War as soldiers of the Soviet Army or in partisan units. Among them were Erich Weinert, Willi Bredel, Gottfreid Grünberg and Günther Tenner.

Otto Heppner, Hermann Massinger, Richard Hoffmann, Hermann Salinger, Bruno Kühn, Albert Hössler, Josef Zettler, Hermann Kramer, Ferdinand Greiner, Heinrich Roßkamp, Vincenz Porombka and Franz Zielasko fought the enemy in Poland and Germany. Most of them were seized by the nazi police or the Gestapo and executed. Josef Zettler did not lose his life only thanks to the solidarity of the prisoners in the concentration camp. Ferdinand Greiner and Vincenz Porombka were among the few that the Gestapo failed to find.

Germans who had fought as members of International Brigades joined partisan units in Yugoslavia, Greece and other nazi-occupied countries. Among them distinction was won by Kurt Lobberger, who had been turned over to the Gestapo from a French internment camp. He was sent to Greece as a soldier of the 999 penal unit, went over to the partisans and became the commander of a German anti-fascist detachment in a regiment of the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS).

In many European countries and overseas (for instance, in Mexico) Germans who had fought in Spain took part in the Free Germany movement.

Former members of the International Brigades Hermann Geisen and Kurt Garbarini, who in 1941 conducted anti-fascist agitation in the Wehrmacht in Belgium, were seized by the Gestapo, taken to Germany and beheaded in the Plötzensee prison in Berlin. Herbert Tschäpe escaped from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in the spring of 1944 and worked in an underground organisation of the German Resistance under Anton Salfkow. He was captured by the Gestapo and executed. The same fate overtook Reinhold Mewes, a member of Beppo Römer's underground group.

Wherever they found themselves—in the underground organisations of the Resistance, in hard labour prisons or in concentration camps—German international brigaders fought the nazi tyranny with selfless courage.

After the nazi regime was smashed by the victorious Soviet Army, the former brigaders joined the ranks of the First Hour Activists.

The men who fought the fascists in Spain may be proud of their contribution to the development of the new society. Today some of them are members of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany or hold posts

in the GDR Government. The National People's Army of the GDR is headed by Heinz Hoffmann, veteran of the battles in Spain. Many of the generals and other senior officers of the GDR Armed Forces were members of International Brigades. Internationalist veterans hold leading posts in the national economy, the health service and cultural life in the GDR. The Committee of German Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters and the Committee for Solidarity with the Spanish People support the fighters against the Franco regime morally and materially.

The true Germany fought, is fighting and will always fight on the side of the magnificent fraternal people of Spain, for the lofty ideals of humanity, national independence, peace, democracy and progress.



## HUNGARY

The freedom struggle of the Spanish people and their call for assistance in the summer of 1936 found a response among the oppressed people of Horthy-ruled Hungary. The developments in Spain were eagerly discussed at factories and in workers' neighbourhoods, above all in the underground Communist and legal Social-Democratic organisations. Reports were read at trade-union meetings, talks on Spain were held at factories, and Spanish songs were sung in the workers' clubs. Books about Spain and Spanish dictionaries were sold out virtually within a few days.

In the course of several months the Social-Democratic newspaper *Nepszava* gave a wide and unbiased coverage of the events in Spain. However, the Minister for Internal Affairs soon ordered it to stop printing these reports. News from Spain first disappeared from the front page, then it was shortened and finally ceased altogether. But the authorities were powerless to prevent the illegal activity of the Communist Party and the Social-Democratic workers' organisations, who appealed to all progressive people for support for the selfless struggle of the Spanish people. "For every person who prizes peace and freedom," said one of the appeals of the Communist Party of Hungary, "it is a matter of honour to support the Spanish people, who have been attacked and are defending the peace and freedom of all peoples."<sup>1</sup>

Under the Horthy dictatorship, solidarity with the Spanish Republic, as any other progressive movement, could be manifested only deep underground. The collection of money was one of the forms of international support. Cells of the International Red Aid began to collect donations. It is indicative that within a month following the outbreak of the war in Spain a sum of 5,000 pengos (according to incomplete data) or nearly \$ 1,000 was collected and sent to Spain.

What the Hungarian working people really felt and thought

<sup>1</sup> *Munkás*, August 30, 1936.

at the time could be freely expressed only outside Hungary. The Aid Spain Campaign therefore assumed a large scale only among Hungarians living abroad. It will be recalled that after the Hungarian Soviet Republic was crushed in 1919 nearly 100,000 Communists and other progressives had to leave Hungary. They formed the nucleus of the political emigres. In subsequent years hundreds of thousands of Hungarians left their country in search of work.

The Hungarian emigres living in France, Belgium and Canada were particularly active in helping Spain. Lectures, film shows and literary evenings devoted to the struggle of the Spanish people were organised in workers' neighbourhoods where Hungarians resided, and placards and maps showing the course of the fighting were hung on the walls.

The collection of donations was one of the major activities in the Hungarian emigre movement of solidarity with Spain. The tiny donations grew into a considerable aid fund. This was due in large measure to the efforts of women, whose husbands, fathers and brothers were fighting in Spain. They took part in agitation and organised shows, thereby drawing attention to and sympathy for the fighters for the Spanish Republic. Widespread popularity was won by two Hungarian dancers, Anna Poor and Klara Tarr, whose husbands fought and died in Spain. In Paris there was hardly a trade-union or workers' club where they did not stage a performance in aid of the Spanish people. A particularly deep impression was made on audiences by their dance, *Children of Madrid*, which conveyed the horrors of the bombing of the Spanish capital.

In Belgium the Hungarian solidarity movement was headed by party groups of Communists and Social-Democrats, who worked in close unity following the formation of the Belgian United Anti-Fascist Front. In Brussels the Communists and Social-Democrats took turns in arranging lectures devoted to the events in Spain. The evenings organised to increase the Spanish aid fund were attended also by those Hungarians who usually shunned political activity and held aloof from the working-class movement.

Some 40,000 Hungarians, among whom substantial influence was enjoyed by the Communist Party of Canada, were resident in Canada in the 1930s. Despite the hardships multiplied by the economic crisis, the Hungarian emigres collected large sums in aid of the Spanish people. They sent many parcels with cigarettes, tobacco, soap, clothes, bandages and medicines, and set up blood donation centres in Canada. During the first months following the fascist revolt the Hungarians, together with their Canadian comrades, bought and sent two ambulances to Spain. To collect funds the Hungarian organisations arranged shows, dances and concerts.

The finest representatives of the Hungarian intelligentsia took



part in the mighty solidarity movement that embraced the whole world. The writers Emile Madarász, Lajos Kassák, Zseni Várnai, György Bálint, Imre Forbáth, Antal Hidas, Gyula Illyés, László Herebejös, Attila József, Miklós Rádnóti, Mihály András Rónai, Miklós Vető and Aladár Komját devoted their works to the developments in Spain and inspired Hungarians to fight fascism, which was the common enemy of the Spanish and Hungarian peoples. In this connection mention must be made of Aladár Komját's poem *March of the International Brigade*, which was put to music by the Hungarian composer Paul Armand, who was living in Paris at the time. For nearly three years this song put heart into the Hungarian volunteers in Spain and to this day it resounds as an ardent appeal calling for the fulfilment of the proletarian internationalist duty.

In September and October 1936, when it became apparent that material assistance was not enough for the Spanish Republic, nearly 1,000 Hungarians went to Spain. Volunteers came not only from Hungary but also from France, Belgium, Canada, the Soviet Union, the USA, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and other countries.

In Hungary itself many who wanted to join the Republican Army were unable to do so. The Horthy regime raised every possible obstacle to prevent volunteers from leaving for Spain. In the instructions of January 16, 1937 from the Minister for Internal Affairs to the frontier authorities it was stated: "Without exit permits and in most cases by foot, persons with Bolshevik sympathies and also jobless are fleeing to Czechoslovakia, and from Czechoslovakia they are being smuggled to Spain. . . . Persons crossing the frontier illegally shall be closely questioned and, having in mind the above-mentioned circumstance, every effort shall be made to ascertain and register every case pointing to the activities of recruiting agents or showing that the defector secretly intends to join the Spanish Red Army. . . . With reference to these instructions every such person shall be taken to the political department of the Central Police Administration in Budapest."<sup>1</sup>

Despite stringent police measures, the attempts to leave for Spain illegally did not cease. But only 120 persons managed to reach Spain. The others were seized at the Hungarian frontier or detained in neighbouring countries and returned to Hungary. For instance, during the first weeks of the civil war a group of 40 building workers crossed the frontier into Czechoslovakia, but only a few of them reached Spain.

The trade unions and the Communist Party organised the selection of volunteers in Hungary. The largest contribution to this

work was made by the building workers', metalworkers' and bakers' trade unions. Mátyás Kronovitz, a leader of the bakers' union, who subsequently volunteered to Spain and died the death of a hero, was particularly active in this work.

The money for the travelling expenses of the volunteers was donated by their work-mates. Some went to Spain by foot with only a few pengos in their pockets. They included Vilmos Zsinko, member of the Central Committee of the Young Workers' Communist League, László Humhál and László Teke, who headed the League's Budapest organisation, and István Bakalár, an active member of the YWCL. Before they reached Spain many volunteers spent months in prison in Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France or other capitalist countries.

The journey from Budapest to Madrid took Ferenc Kerekes five months. In reminiscences written in 1938, soon after the events, he gives an account of this journey:

"I was working in Budapest when I heard that the fascist generals had risen in revolt against the lawful democratic government of Spain.

"I took my wife and son to my parents in order to be able to leave for Spain at once. I was denied a passport, but that did not discourage me. I did not abandon my intention and on December 25, 1936, I set out for Madrid.

"I had no money and knew no foreign language. I reached Austria and from there I headed for Switzerland across the snow-bound Alps. The difficulties were formidable. Four times I was caught on the frontier and turned back. The fifth attempt was successful. No less difficult was my journey to France. From Lyons, where I was held in prison for thirty days, I travelled to Marseilles, counting on boarding a ship and sailing secretly to Barcelona. But I was caught again and they wanted to force me to join the Foreign Legion. But I managed to escape. In Perpignan I landed in prison again, for twenty days. Upon my release I set across the Pyrenees.

"On May 17 I reached Figueras, and from there I went to Albacete. Finally, my wish came true, and I set out for Madrid, where I got the opportunity of fighting for a noble cause."<sup>1</sup>

For Hungarians living abroad the journey to Spain was not so arduous. However, they had to make large sacrifices. Many left wives and children without a breadwinner or kin.

In Uruguay nearly 50 Hungarian volunteers signed up as soon as it became known that International Brigades were being formed in Spain. The Hungarian Communist organisation checked with the families of the volunteers and decided to approve the departure only of bachelors or married men who had no children: the

<sup>1</sup> Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt KB, Párttörténeti Intézet, Archivum, A/VII.1/20.

<sup>1</sup> Spanyol földön a Rabadságért, Barcelona, 1938, p. 17.



organisation was unable to support the families of the volunteers. Gyula Kovacsik, secretary of the Hungarian Party group, was the first to sign up. He was wounded at Brunete in July 1937, and although he was crippled, he rejoined the ranks. While he was in hospital he had written to the Hungarians residing in Uruguay, calling upon them to take his place in his unit. Many responded to this letter. The Party group sent six volunteers to Spain. Kovacsik fell in action at Lerida in 1938.

In the Spanish Republican Army two of the Hungarian volunteers held the rank of general. One of them was Máté Zalka, a Communist, soldier and author. He had been a prisoner-of-war in Russia, and after the Great October Socialist Revolution he joined the Red Army, becoming an officer and fighting till the end of the Civil War (1919-22). In October 1936, he went to Spain from Moscow under the assumed name of Pál Lukacs. He was in command first of the 12th International Brigade and then of the 45th Republican Division. The second Hungarian general in Spain was János Gál. Like Zalka, he had been taken prisoner on the Russian Front during the First World War. He had taken part in the socialist revolution in Russia and fought in the Red Army during the Civil War. Later, as a regular officer, he had graduated from the Frunze Military Academy. In Spain the Republican Government promoted him to the rank of general and appointed him commander of the 15th International Brigade. Later he was in command of the 15th Republican Division.

Nine of the Hungarian volunteers held the rank of major. One of them was Ferenc Münnich, a veteran internationalist, who had taken part in the Great October Socialist Revolution and been a leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. He went to Spain under the assumed name of Ottó Flatter. He held various command posts, and in the period from April to the end of August 1938 he was in command of the 11th International Brigade.

Dezso Jász, who had been a regimental commissar in the Red Army of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, fought in Spain under the assumed name of Juan de Pablo. As a colonel he held various high posts, including that of Operations Chief at the HQ of the Northern Army.

Among the other Hungarian volunteers whose names are known, 99 were officers and 47 were non-commissioned officers. In the Spanish Republican Army there were 15 Hungarian doctors and 10 nurses.

The first Hungarian volunteers arrived in Spain in early August 1936. Among them was Mihály Szalvai, who had joined the Hungarian Communist Party as soon as it was formed. A Horthy counter-revolutionary court sentenced him to 15 years imprisonment for being a soldier of the Hungarian Red Army. He escaped

from prison and after long wanderings in Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, Belgium and France he finally reached Spain. The first group of volunteers included Endre Keszöcze, who had been in the working-class movement from the age of 14. In Paris he had worked at the Renault car factory and in 1927 joined the French Communist Party.

At the close of September 1936 there were 45 Hungarian volunteers in the Republican Army. On October 11, 1936, over 600 volunteers, of whom 46 were Hungarians, arrived in Figueras, a Spanish border town. One of them was István Stechmayer, who became widely known among the volunteers by the name of Stefi. In Spain he graduated from an officers' school, following which he was put in command first of a platoon and then of a company. In February 1938 he was killed in Estremadura.

In the same group were Hungarians who had come from Belgium. They included Endre Basch, who had been a leader of the Hungarian emigre Communist organisation in Brussels. He went to Spain with his wife and son, and with them he was active in the anti-fascist struggle. Holding the rank of lieutenant he was in charge of the Salamanca Army Barracks in the town of Albacete, and then until the end of the civil war he was in command of an artillery unit. During the nazi occupation of France the Gestapo arrested him as a leader of the underground anti-fascist movement, and his life was cut short in a death camp.

A Hungarian unit of 91 men was formed in Albacete on October 17, 1936. This unit became the third company of the Edgar André Battalion of the 11th International Brigade. The Hungarian Company included a Yugoslav Platoon. On November 9, the Hungarian Company received its baptism of fire on the Madrid Front on the Manzanares river. Despite heavy casualties the Hungarian Company stood firm and justified the trust that was placed in it by the people of Madrid. Three years later one of the Hungarians who had been in this battle wrote:

"We had been up early that morning. After breakfast we were ordered to prepare for battle. Soon we heard rifle fire—it was the People's Militia courageously fighting the fascist mercenaries at the Casa de Campo. . . . The company moved toward its position at 11 o'clock. But we had hardly covered 800 metres across the park than we ran into a hail of fascist bullets.

"The company deployed within a few minutes and quickly advanced in the direction of the French Bridge. We soon saw the bridge and the Manzanares. On our side of the river several militiamen with one machine-gun were guarding the bridge behind a barricade of sandbags.

"The internationalists have come,' the militiamen said to one another. Some of them thought we were Russians. The company commander ordered the first and second platoons to a position





Máté Zalka (Pál Lukács), commander of the 12th International Brigade, and members of his staff

to the left of the bridge. The third platoon and the machine-guns were sent across the river to the far side of the bridge.

"These orders were carried out immediately. Paying no attention to the bullets whistling through the air we waded into the icy water. A hard-fought battle began. Our small unit fought numerically superior forces. The machine-gunners under Chapayev (Szalvai's pseudonym) and Keszöcze sowed death among the advancing close ranks of fascists, Moroccans and cutthroats from the Foreign Legion. I could hear the rattle of Ferenc Kovács'

submachine. The fascists were not more than 30 metres away from us. The commander ordered the fourth platoon into battle. . . . The enemy tried to force us back with hand grenades, but we held our ground."

The commander of the Hungarian Company was wounded at the French Bridge. His place was taken by Mihály Szalvai, commander of the machine-gunners. As an officer he was brave, level-headed and exacting. He was on friendly terms with his men and they loved him for it. A few weeks later, at the close of November, he was wounded. He returned to the front at the close of January 1937 with the rank of major and was appointed commander of the Edgar André Battalion, 11th International Brigade. He led the battalion in the fighting on the Jarama and Guadalajara fronts. At the end of March he was appointed commander of the Dimitrov Battalion, 15th International Brigade.

A Hungarian volunteer named Rezső Szántó distinguished himself during a critical moment of the fighting at Guadalajara as commander of an artillery battery of the 12th International Brigade. The Italian fascists had broken through the lines at the junction between two International Brigades and there was a threat of an enveloping movement. General Lukács saw this danger and sent the brigade's entire staff into the battle. Rezső Szántó turned his artillery and fired with deadly effect on the fascists, who were attacking from the rear, forcing them to flee.

The victory at Guadalajara gave the Republicans a short respite. When the Hungarian Company was withdrawn to the village of Meco for a rest a Hungarian Battalion began to be formed on the initiative of Máté Zalka, János Gál and Ferenc Münnich. The Hungarian volunteers, who had been in other international units, were now concentrated at Meco. The battalion was formed quickly under the direction of Captain Lajos Cséby, who was known as Pedro Fernandez. The first order of the day in the battalion, which was named after Mátyás Rákosi,<sup>1</sup> was posted on April 1, 1937. Soon afterwards the 12th Brigade was formed into a division under Máté Zalka. It consisted of two International Brigades—Garibaldi and Dabrowski. The Hungarian Battalion became part of the Dabrowski Brigade.

The numerical strength of the Hungarian Battalion grew steadily. New volunteers arrived, men who had been wounded returned to the ranks after recuperating from their wounds, and

<sup>1</sup> At a meeting in 1956 marking the 20th anniversary of the formation of the International Brigades, the Hungarians who had been volunteers adopted a statement in which they declared: "In 1936 the thousand Hungarians who held high the banner of freedom and proletarian internationalism in Spain, inscribed on that banner the name of the man who before a Horthy court had championed the Hungarian people and courageously fulfilled his duty. In 1949 we were bitterly disappointed. That man himself erased his name from that heroic banner."





Mihály Szalvai ("Chapayev")

The battalion commander was Ákos Hevesi, who had fought for the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Horthy regime sentenced him to ten years' imprisonment, but in 1922 he was exchanged by the Soviet Government for prisoners-of-war and went to the USSR. In Spain he was known as Major Pal Niebuhr.

Not all of the Hungarians fighting in Spain were in the battalion commanded by Ákos Hevesi. The Petöfi Platoon of the 15th International Brigade consisted of Hungarians, most of whom were Czechoslovak citizens. Captain Sándor Sziklai was a staff officer at the Madrid Front. A prisoner-of-war in Russia during the First World War, he had taken part in the Great October Socialist Revolution and in the Civil War and joined the Bolshevik Party in Russia in 1917. In Spain he was known as Peter Ladi. Serving with him was Miklós Steinmetz, who, as a truce envoy of the Soviet Army, was foully killed by the nazis at the approaches to Budapest on December 29, 1944.

The first operation of the Hungarian Battalion and of the entire 45th Division was the offensive in early June 1937 at the town of Huesca on the Aragon Front. In the evening of June 11, on the eve of the offensive, a fascist shell cut short the life of the division commander, Máté Zalka, while he was inspecting the front lines.

graduates of the officers' school were posted to the battalion. Its first commissar was György Weiszbrunn, who had been a member of the working-class movement in France. Later he was replaced by Imre Tarr, a veteran of the Red Army of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. He left Hungary when the counter-revolution triumphed in that country and upon his return in 1923 he was sentenced to a term of three years in prison. After serving his sentence he went to France, where he wrote for a Communist newspaper and was a leading member of the Hungarian group of the French Communist Party.

Battalion Commander Ákos Hevesi and Battalion Commissar Imre Tarr also lost their lives in this operation.

The Hungarian Battalion of the Dabrowski Brigade fought in many battles, which cost it innumerable lives. Among the fallen heroes were Company Commander Imre Ébert, who was killed at Brunete in the summer of 1937, and Pal Nagy, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Hungary.

The battles in Estremadura were followed by hard defensive fighting in the spring of 1938, when the enemy broke through the Aragon Front. The 13th Brigade distinguished itself during the defence of Lérida. Outstanding leadership was displayed in these battles by Mihály Szalvai, who had taken over the command of the Hungarian Battalion in August 1937. An eye-witness account of an episode of the Aragon retreat is given by Imre Mezö in reminiscences published in 1938:

"After the battalion had taken up a new defensive line, Szalvai as usual was inspecting the positions of one of the companies when somebody sounded the alarm.

"Enemy cavalry were charging in the direction of the hill where the men had dug in temporarily. The machine-gunners managed to fire only one belt before the cavalymen were upon the Hungarian positions. An unequal battle ensued, and it was only due to Szalvai's cool-headedness and resourcefulness and the staunchness of the men that the cavalry attack was repulsed, with the enemy suffering heavy losses."<sup>1</sup>

During the 42 days' fighting on the Aragon Front the ranks of the Hungarian volunteers were again thinned. The casualties at the defence of Lérida included the company Party organiser, György Sebes, and Battalion Commissar György Weiszbrunn.

During offensive of the Republican Army of the Ebro, the Hungarian Battalion was the first unit in the sector of the 13th Brigade to cross the river. The order for the crossing was received on July 24 at 21.30 hours, and by 00.30 hours the battalion had successfully completed the operation. After capturing Camposinas the 13th Brigade advanced in the direction of Gandesa. The Hungarian Battalion inflicted heavy losses on the fascists, capturing many prisoners and a large quantity of equipment.

In the course of two weeks in August, during the defence of the bridgehead on the right bank of the Ebro, the battalion's casualties were 30 killed and 105 wounded.

The Hungarian Battalion was at the firing lines until September 23, 1938, when the Republican Government recalled the international volunteers from the front.

At the farewell ceremony the men of the Dabrowski Brigade, the

<sup>1</sup> *Spanyol földön a Rabadságért*, p. 42.





Hungarian volunteers. Second row, left to right: Akos Hevesi (Major Nicbuhr), Captain István Molnár, Rezső Szántó (Major Baller)

soldiers of the Hungarian Battalion among them, pledged their fidelity in the following words:

"We, freedom volunteers of the Dabrowski Brigade, soldiers of the invincible Spanish People's Army, defenders of the freedom of the Spanish people and all the peoples of the world, we sons of Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, mortal enemies of fascism, barbarism and national oppression, swear in this beloved land of Spain, where we have left the graves of our comrades, we swear by the blood shed in the struggle against fascism, by our revolutionary and anti-fascist consciousness, by our battle banners, by the decorations we have received from the hands of the Republican Government that to our last breath we shall be true to the ideals, for whose defence we had come to Spain. We shall carry on this struggle wherever life takes us.

"We swear to be eternally true to the Spanish people, whose blood has mixed with our blood. We swear to be true to the Government of the Republic and to the Command of the People's Army and solemnly declare that we shall return to the ranks of the People's Army at any time ... if that is needed and desired by the Republic. ...

"But even should there be no need for us to return to you, the memory of liberty, the passion for which burns in you and for which you have fought so heroically, shall live on in our hearts and in the hearts of the coming generation."

\* \* \*

On January 23, 1939, the volunteers awaiting to be evacuated from Spain, with Hungarians among them, again took up arms to fight in the last battles as soldiers of the Catalan Army. It was necessary to safeguard the withdrawal of the wounded and the hospitals and cover the stream of refugees who were fleeing to the French frontier from the fascist army that had broken through the Catalan Front.

Even wounded men—László Rajk, András Tömpe and László Gyáros among them—joined the newly-formed international units. Along with the other volunteers and the Spanish troops, the Hungarian volunteers honourably discharged their last duty.

They crossed the frontier into France at Port-Bou on February 9, 1939. The heroic freedom fighters were met by French colonial troops, gendarmes and concentration camps.

Despite the bitterness of defeat, the Hungarian volunteers were eager to continue the struggle against fascism. A Communist Party organisation was set up and began to operate as soon as the volunteers were taken to concentration camps. The struggle did not cease for a moment in these camps. The moral and political staunchness and the internationalist and anti-fascist tempering of the Hungarian volunteers were soon put to a new test.

The Second World War broke out on September 1, 1939.

The French authorities wanted the men of the International Brigades to join the Foreign Legion. This was rejected by the volunteers. They wanted to fight fascism, not colonial peoples. Fifty-two volunteers, including ten Hungarians, whom the authorities suspected of organising Resistance, were taken to a penal camp at Vernet and then to a camp at Djelfa, Algeria, on the border of the Sahara. The other volunteers were shipped to that camp soon afterwards.

In March 1941, after France had been occupied by the nazis, some of the volunteers escaped while they were being deported to labour in Germany and made their way home. They continued the struggle against fascism in Hungary as members of the underground anti-fascist movement. Among them was László Rajk, who had been the secretary of the Party organisation in the Hungarian Battalion and became a secretary of the Central Committee of the underground Communist Party of Hungary. Many of those who returned to Hungary were seized and imprisoned or killed. The latter included Pal Fűgedi.

Algeria was liberated by the Allies in 1943 and the volunteers held at the Djelfa camp were able to go to the USSR to take part in the struggle against nazi Germany. In May 1944, Mihály Szalvai flew to Yugoslavia where he joined in the liberation struggle of the Yugoslav people. Sándor Sziklai, who became an





The Hungarian Battalion after the Aragon battles, 1938

officer of the Soviet Army, returned to Hungary in the autumn of 1944. Ferenc Münnich fought in the battle of Stalingrad, that marked the turning point of the Second World War.

Other Hungarians continued the anti-fascist struggle as members of the Resistance in France, Belgium and other countries where circumstances took them. Thirty-three of them died in this struggle—among them were István Molnár, who in Spain commanded the Polish Palafox Battalion, and Lieutenant László Marschall, who during the liberation of Paris in August 1944 was in command of a barricade at the crossing of the St. Germaine and St. Michel boulevards and later commanded the Petöfi Company in the French Army.

After Hungary's liberation in 1945 the former Hungarian volunteers in Spain energetically helped to restore their country and then build the foundations of socialism. Many became ministers, deputy ministers, generals or army officers. From 1958 through 1961 Ferenc Münnich was Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic.

The former volunteers took up arms again during the counter-revolutionary revolt in Budapest in October 1956. Imre Mezö, Secretary of the Budapest City Party Committee, and Major-Gen-

eral Sándor Sziklai, who headed the Institute of Military History, were killed in this struggle.

Today nearly 150 former volunteers live in Hungary and many of them are still active in political and civic life. They are a living example for the rising generation, an example of revolutionary passion and of fidelity to the ideals of socialism and proletarian internationalism.



## IRELAND

Thirteen years before the rising of the Spanish fascist generals, Ireland had a civil war. This was on the issue of full national independence from British imperialism—following a four-year period of mass resistance and a militant guerrilla struggle. The conservative bourgeoisie and its abettors in the national movement accepted the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, which created two states in Ireland: one formally independent and the other colonial. This treaty was opposed by a radical section of the national movement, and a bitter civil war broke out. In 1923 the pro-treatyites won a military victory with the help of British armaments.

The Irish civil war created a major dividing line among the Irish people. It was followed by an uneasy peace. In 1932 the pro-treaty government headed by William Cosgrave was defeated in a general election. A new government was formed by the Fianna Fail Party led by Eamon De Valera. That party mainly represented the interests of the smaller capitalists, traders and middle farmers. Its programme called for strengthening Ireland politically and economically as an independent state. However, in the social sphere the De Valera Government largely continued Cosgrave's anti-labour policies.

The electoral defeat of the Cosgrave Government was a setback for Irish reaction. To regain ground, the reactionaries launched a hysterical campaign against the Left Republicans and Communists. In March 1933, incited by the reactionaries, a mob sacked Connolly House, the headquarters of the Irish Revolutionary Workers and Small Farmers Groups, from which, despite the terror and government persecution, the Communist Party of Ireland was formed in June 1933. On its initiative the Irish Republican Congress, which united the Left Republicans, the tenant and unemployed associations, the small farmers and other organisations, was founded in September 1934.

In Ireland, as in other European countries, there was a fascist movement that called itself the "blueshirt movement". Its leader was General Owen O'Duffy, who had commanded the pro-treaty

troops and had been chief of police until the election of the De Valera Government. O'Duffy had established contact with international fascist circles and incorporated in the objectives of the blueshirt movement the creation of an Irish corporative state. On February 28, 1934, Deputy J. A. Costello declared in the Irish Parliament: "The blackshirts have been victorious in Italy, and the Hitler brownshirts have been victorious in Germany, as assuredly, the blueshirts will be victorious in Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

This fascist threat was met by a fighting united effort of Republicans, trade unionists, Communists and small farmers. Led by Frank Ryan, Tom Barry, George Gilmore, Sean Murray and Peadar O'Donnel, they drove the blueshirts off the streets after many violent encounters. Many of the men who were active in this struggle later joined the International Brigades.

In Ireland the Right-wing forces supported the revolt of the reactionary Spanish generals on July 18, 1936 with a hysterical propaganda campaign. Playing on the religious feeling of the people, the Irish reactionaries, particularly the blueshirts, slandered the Spanish Republic. For instance, the reactionary newspaper *Irish Independent* described the Left-wing bourgeois government, formed by Manuel Azaña in February 1936 after the Popular Front's electoral victory, as a "group of bloodthirsty Bolsheviks, persecutors of Catholic nuns and priests". This sort of propaganda found a response among politically backward sections of the people.

This distortion of the developments in Spain confused even many members of the Irish Labour and Republican organisations. The first clear exposition of the real issues of the war in Spain was given on July 27, 1936 by *The Worker*, the weekly bulletin of the Communist Party of Ireland: "In Spain, as we write, a new immortal page of working-class history is being inscribed. The reports published by the capitalist press are like a dust cloud obscuring the fighters as they strain in combat, but from the glimpses of the truth we can picture the rest." After detailing the programme of the Spanish Popular Front the weekly stressed that the programme had the full support of the Socialists and the Communists, neither of whom had representatives in the government. It ended the report with the words: "Greetings to our heroic Spanish brothers and sisters in their glorious fight!"

This clear declaration by the Communist weekly helped many to assess the situation correctly, but the capitalist press proceeded shamelessly to poison the minds of the Irish people. In the ferment of organised hysteria O'Duffy, the leader of the blueshirts, posed as a "saviour of religion" and announced his intention to form an Irish Brigade of volunteers to "fight for Christianity in

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Independent*, February 29, 1934.



Spain".<sup>1</sup> The reactionary Irish Christian Front was formed and it held rallies attended by clerical and lay dignitaries, who with religious slogans campaigned for Irish support for Franco. As a result, the large sum of £30,000 was collected at the church doors allegedly for the reconstruction of the churches damaged or destroyed in the fighting. Some of it found its way to the Franco forces and the rest disappeared, a fact that was, needless to say, completely played down.

The Irish anti-fascists staunchly fought the hate campaign against Republican Spain. They were helped considerably by the clear analysis given by Sean Murray, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, in his weekly articles on Spain in *The Worker*. Meetings were held to give people the truth about Spain. An outstanding public speaker, Murray addressed these meetings. On one occasion he said: "I warn the workers of Ireland against the press reports about atrocities in Spain. These come from imperialist liars, the hirelings of fascism. Their purpose is to turn the outside world against the Spanish Republic and to try to get foreign intervention to foist fascism on the people of Spain. These liars are not to be believed." Giving instances of how religious slogans had been used in Ireland's own struggles in order to conceal the upper class opposition to the people's demands, he pointed out that the same tactic was being used in Spain. "The gallant Spanish people," he said, "are not only fighting against the traitors within Spain but against the enemies of liberty throughout all Europe, Ireland included. This makes the Spanish question indeed a question for the friends of freedom in every land. Are we in Ireland to stand aside and allow this crime against the people of Spain to be carried out before our eyes?"<sup>2</sup>

Another powerful voice that came to the defence of the Spanish Republic was that of Peadar O'Donnell. A well-known guerrilla fighter in 1920-23 and the author of many books, he had actually been travelling in Spain when the fascist revolt occurred. His first-hand accounts made an important contribution to making the truth known. Also active in championing the Spanish Republic was another famous Irish guerrilla, Ernie O'Malley, the

<sup>1</sup> Recruited to fight on Franco's side, the Irish Brigade was in Spain for less than six months. It took part in only one action with Moroccan troops and lost two men in the encounter. Four others were killed during a brief period in the trenches. Realising that they had been duped the men of the brigade mutinied and demanded to be sent home. Upon their return to Ireland they were given a carefully managed hero's welcome. For some time they basked in the blaze of publicity, which extolled their "deeds" in the Franco army. With the aid of clericals, pressure was applied on them to prevent them from telling the truth about Franco Spain. The news of this brigade's fiasco was printed in only a few newspapers, one of which was *The New York Times*. A varnished account of the brigade's "exploits" is given in a book published by Owen O'Duffy in Dublin in 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *The Worker*, August 15, 1936.



General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland Sean Murray addresses a meeting of solidarity with Republican Spain in Dublin

author of *On Another Man's Wounds*, a well-known book on the Irish War of Independence.

Regrettably, in this tense situation there was no clear call from either the Irish Trade Union Congress or the Irish Labour (Social-Democratic) Party. However, at the annual conference of the Irish Trade Union Congress in August 1936 Christie Clark (Irish National Union of Woodworkers), Bob Smith (Plumbing Trade Union) and some other delegates did raise their voices in support of their Spanish brothers. The Irish newspapers, however, suppressed all mention of their statements in their reports of the congress meetings.

With the growth of the people's solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle in Spain the Irish capitalist and religious press stepped up its campaign of lies and slander. Despite the paucity of progressive papers and the existence of pogrom-like atmosphere the fearless work of the first defenders of the Spanish Republic in Ireland began to have results. An All-Ireland Spanish Aid Committee was formed. It was headed by prominent public figures like Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington (widow of an Irish pacifist who was murdered by a British Army officer in 1916); Dorothy MacArdle, the Irish writer; Nora Connolly-O'Brien (daughter of James Connolly, the Irish Socialist leader who was executed by the British imperialists for his leadership of the uprising of 1916) and R. N. Tweedy. In Belfast Harry Midgely, the Labour



Member of the Parliament and Chairman of the Labour Party of Northern Ireland, declared his stand with the anti-fascists of Spain. Despite a campaign of intimidation against them, the delegates to the Irish Conference of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union in September 1936 unanimously declared their approval of the British Executive's decision in granting £1,000 for aid to the Spanish Government. A committee was formed in Dublin and Belfast to organise an Irish Ambulance Corps for the Spanish Republican Army.

Although the Irish Catholic Church was violently pro-Franco, the Reverend Michael O'Flanagan fearlessly and heroically championed the cause of Republican Spain. He had played a leading part in the movement against British imperialism and had been one of the few priests who openly denounced the treaty of 1921. Speaking at a meeting of solidarity with Republican Spain in the Engineers Hall, Dublin, on December 3, 1936, O'Flanagan said: "The fight in Spain is a fight between the rich privileged classes as against the rank and file of the poor oppressed people of Spain. The cause being fought for in Spain is nearer to us than realised. The Foreign Legion and the Moorish troops are to Spain what the Black and Tans (a mercenary corps of ex-British officers of World War I sent to Ireland in 1920-21 as a special punitive and terror detachment against the Irish guerrillas and civilian population.—*Author*) were to Ireland."<sup>1</sup> He spoke against the activities of the Irish Christian Front in recruiting an Irish Brigade for Franco.

O'Flanagan and the Spanish Aid Committee (which later developed into the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic) exposed the claim of the Spanish fascists and the Irish reactionaries that the war in Spain was on religious issues. Father O'Flanagan went on a lecture tour of the USA and Canada, where he spoke at many meetings and delivered many broadcasts in which he emphasised to the Catholics of these countries the real issues in Spain. He died in Dublin on August 7, 1942, a sterling Irish patriot and militant anti-fascist to the end.

Although they were frightened by the persecution of champions of the Spanish Republic, many trade-union leaders made generous but anonymous personal subscriptions to the Spanish Aid Committee, while some (for example, John Swift, now General Secretary of the Irish Bakers' Union and President of the International Union of Food Workers) were forthright in raising financial aid from their fellow trade-unionists. Supporters of the Spanish Republic held a meeting on January 17, 1937 in the Gaiety Theatre, one of Dublin's largest halls. The main speaker was Father Ramon Laborda, a Basque priest. He exposed the assertion that the fas-

<sup>1</sup> *The Worker*, December 12, 1936.

cists were defending Christianity: "When I read recently that the Catholics of Ireland were offering men and money to fascist Franco, the personification of the most brutal imperialism, I exclaimed indignantly: 'It is impossible.' Ireland could not do that unless she has been miserably deceived."<sup>1</sup>

There was a quick response in Ireland to the news that foreign anti-fascist volunteers were arriving in Spain. The Communists took part in this manifestation of international solidarity.

In September 1936, the decision was taken to form an Irish unit for the Spanish Republican Army. The Communist Party of Ireland gave the task of recruitment and organisation to Bill Gannon, a Party member who had considerable experience of political work in the Irish Republican Army and been decorated with an Irish Governmental Medal for his distinguished record in the Irish national struggle. The first Irish volunteer arrived in Spain in early September. He was Bill Scott, a bricklayer, member of the CPI, one-time member of the Irish Republican Army, and son of a veteran of the working-class movement who had taken part in the 1916 rising led by James Connolly. In Barcelona he joined a group of French, German, Italian and English anti-fascists, who formed an International Centuria that later took the name of Thaelmann. In the defence of Madrid Bill Scott fought with the Thaelmann Battalion. In a letter to Sean Murray he wrote: "You needn't mind who knows I am in Spain ... for ... it's the most sacred cause in history to defend Freedom."<sup>2</sup> The first Irish anti-fascists fell in action in December 1936 defending Madrid. They were Tommy Patton of Achill, County Mayo, and William Barry of Dublin, who came all the way from Melbourne in Australia to Madrid.

The first organised group of Irish volunteers left for Spain in December. It was led by Frank Ryan, who prior to the departure made a press statement, in which he said: "The Irish contingent is a demonstration of revolutionary Ireland's solidarity with the gallant Spanish workers and peasants in their fight for freedom against fascism. It aims to redeem Irish honour besmirched by the intervention of Irish fascism on the side of the Spanish fascist rebels. It is to aid the revolutionary movements in Ireland to defeat the fascist menace at home, and finally, and not the least, to establish the closest fraternal bonds of kinship between the Republican democracies of Ireland and Spain."<sup>3</sup>

Frank Ryan, commander of the Irish in the International Brigades, personified the best militant and revolutionary traditions of the Irish people. At the age of 18 he had taken part in the war against the Black and Tans and subsequently against the pro-

<sup>1</sup> *The Worker*, January 23, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *The Worker*, March 19, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *The Worker*, December 19, 1936.



treaty forces in the Irish civil war. A revolutionary journalist, he was for many years the editor of *An Phoblacht (The Republic)*. He was one of the founders and the secretary of the Irish Republican Congress. In the period from 1923 to 1932 he was imprisoned time and again by the Cosgrave Government. He was a respected figure for his integrity and fighting personality and for his efforts to promote Irish culture (he was an enthusiast in the Irish-Gaelic-national language revival movement).

With him in the first organised group went outstanding figures in the Irish Republican, communist and working-class movements. Among these were Kit Conway of Tipperary, a legendary figure of the Black and Tans and civil wars; Jack Nalty and Paddy Duff; Donal O'Reilly (a veteran IRA fighter from a well-known revolutionary family), Frank Edwards of Waterford, who had been dismissed from his post as a teacher because of his anti-fascist activity; Seamus Cummins and Jim Prendergast, a well-known activist and public speaker for the Irish Communist Party. The first Irish group went to Madrigueras to be shaped into a military unit. This was speedily done as most of them, including the youngest, had at some stage or other been members of the IRA in which they had a military training. The Irish section of the International Brigade became known as the James Connolly Unit.

The ranks of the Irish in Madrigueras were continually augmented by new arrivals from Ireland as well as by many other Irishmen who had come from Britain and the U.S.A. The latter had been driven into exile by the economic pressure of unemployment or had been forced to leave Ireland for political reasons. Among the Irish there were two sets of brothers—John, Willie and Paddy Power from Waterford and the three O'Flahertys from Boston, the "Little Ireland" of the U.S.A.

The revolutionary background, the fighting traditions, political conduct and military fervour of the Irish attracted to their ranks English-speaking comrades who could claim no relationship with Ireland. They included Samuel Lee, a young Jewish volunteer, who was later to die with his Irish comrades in the battle of Jarama, and John Scott from South Africa, who fell near Morata.

On December 24, 1936, the Irish Unit went to the front for the first time along with the British and the French 12th Battalion of the 14th International Brigade. At the time not all of the brigade's units had been formed, but an emergency—a fascist breakthrough of the Republican front in the south near Cordoba—required immediate action. As they approached the front, to be more exact, the locality where the front was believed to be, for nobody knew how far the fascists had penetrated, they were strafed by aircraft. Reaching an olive grove by a sand road they were caught in a cross-fire by machine-guns from the surrounding

ridges. The battalion, including the Irish, continued its advance and occupied a hill, driving the fascists off.

However, it soon appeared that the battalion was almost completely encircled by the fascists. There was confusion among the untrained men, and soon a withdrawal was ordered. In this unexpected encounter the battalion suffered heavy casualties. The Irish Unit lost nine men. They were: John Meehan of Galway, the Dublin workers Michael Nolan, Jim Foley, Leo Green, Tony Fox, Henry Bonar and Tommy Woods, the young Irish Republican Boy Scout Mick May (who, as Frank Ryan wrote, "did great work . . . covering off his comrades as they went back under shell and machine-gun fire") and Frank Conroy ("who fought like a hero the same day")<sup>1</sup>. The other battalions of the 14th Brigade arrived in a few days and together with the Spanish units they counter-attacked and brought the enemy to a halt.

Soon afterwards the brigade was transferred to the Central Front, where the Republican forces were repulsing a strong fascist thrust towards the northeastern approaches of Madrid. The Irish were in action from January 11 through 14 in a counter-attack on the village of Majadahonda. The Dublin worker Denis Coady was killed in this counter-attack. His comrades buried him in Torreloaños. In the fighting Captain Kit Conway particularly distinguished himself for his leadership in repulsing an attempted counter-attack by the Moroccans at nightfall. A large number of the James Connolly Unit was wounded. Jack Nalty who had been wounded in the chest by a burst of machine-gun fire, walked five kilometres to the nearest dressing station. A well-known athlete, he survived the first and all subsequent battles of the Irish Unit, and fell in the last action of the 15th Brigade on the Ebro in September 1938.

The Irish mourned not only their own dead but also the death on the Cordoba Front of Ralph Fox, a talented English Communist writer, a company political commissar. He had endeared himself to them for his book *Marx, Engels and Lenin on Ireland*. Many of the Irish fighters had read this book and it had strengthened their conviction that Irish national liberation had to be closely linked with international proletarian solidarity.

Because of the high rate of casualties the James Connolly Unit was disbanded and the Irish volunteers were divided between the British and American battalions of the newly-formed Abraham Lincoln 15th International Brigade. In the ranks of this brigade they fought in the famous battle of the Jarama. In that battle there were defeats and victories. One of the engagements was recorded by Frank Ryan:

"On the road from Chinchón to Madrid, the road along which we had marched to the attack three days before, were scattered

<sup>1</sup> *The Worker*, February 6, 1937.



now all who survived—a few hundred Britons, Irish and Spaniards. Dispirited by heavy casualties, by defeat, by lack of food, worn out by three days of gruelling fighting, our men appeared to have reached the end of their resistance. Some were still straggling down the slopes which had been, up to an hour ago, the front line. And now there was no line.... After three days of terrific struggle, the superior numbers, the superior armaments of the fascists had routed them. All, as they came back, had similar stories to tell; of comrades dead, of conditions that were more than flesh and blood could stand, of weariness they found hard to resist. I recognised the young commissar of the Spanish Company. His hand bloody where a bullet had grazed the palm, he was fumbling nervelessly with his automatic, in turn threatening and pleading with his men. I got Manuel to calm him, and to tell him we would rally everybody in a moment. As I walked along the road to see how many men we had, I found myself deciding that we should go back up the line of the road to San Martin de la Vega and take the Moors on their left flank.

"Groups were lying about on the roadside, hungrily eating oranges that had been thrown to them from a passing lorry.... I found my eyes straying always to the hills we had vacated.... They stumbled to their feet.... One line of four.... A few were still on the grass bank beside the road, adjusting helmets and rifles. 'Hurry up!' came the cry from the ranks. Up the road... I saw Jack Cunningham (the battalion commander.—*Ed.*) assembling another crowd. We hurried up, joined forces. Together, we two marched at the head. The crowd behind was marching silently. The thoughts in their minds could not be inspiring ones. I remembered a trick of the old days when we were holding banned demonstrations. I jerked my head back: 'Sing up, ye sons of guns.'

"Quaveringly at first, then more lustily, then in one resounding chant the song rose from the ranks. Bent backs straightened; tired legs thumped sturdily; what had been a routed rabble marched to battle again as proudly as they had done three days before. And the valley resounded to their singing:

... Then comrades, come rally,  
And the last fight let us face;  
The Internationale unites the human race....

"On we marched, back up the road, nearer and nearer to the front.... I looked back. Beneath the forest of upraised fists, what a strange band: unshaven, unkempt, blood-stained, grimy. *And marching on the road back.* Beside the road stood our Brigade Commander General Gál.... We gave three cheers for him. Briefly, tersely, he spoke to us. We had one and a half hours of daylight in which to recapture our lost positions. "That gap on our right?" A Spanish Battalion was coming up with us to occupy

it. Again the *Internationale* arose. It was being sung in French, too... a group of Franco-Belge had joined us. We passed the Spanish Battalion. They had caught the infection: they were singing, too, as they deployed to the right. Jack Cunningham seemed to be the only man who was not singing. Hands thrust into his greatcoat pockets, he trudged at the head of his men.... We were singing; he was planning.

"As the olive groves loom in sight, we deploy to the left. At last, we are on the ridge, the ridge which we must never again desert. For, while we hold that ridge, the Madrid-Valencia road is free. Bullets whistle through the air, or smack into the ground, or find a human target. Cries, shouts.... But always the louder interminable singing.

"Flat on the ground, we fire into the groves. There are no sections, no companies even. But the individuals jump ahead, and set an example that is readily followed—too readily, because sometimes they block our fire.... Advancing! All the time advancing. As I crawl forward I suddenly realise, with savage joy, that it is *we* who are advancing and they who are being pushed back."<sup>1</sup>

The fascist offensive was hurtled back. But again the Irish, among all the other international volunteers, paid a high price. They lost some of their best and bravest men like the Reverend R. M. Hilliard, known because of his fistic prowess in the ring as the Boxing Parson. In the earlier stage of the fascist advance he had fought on against the advancing tanks with a little group that had neither an anti-tank gun nor grenades. With him died Eamonn McGrotty of Derry, who had been a member of the Irish Christian Brothers, a Catholic teaching order; William Fox, Bill Henry and Dick O'Neil of Belfast; Hugh Bonar of Donegal; Liam Tumilson, the ex-member of the anti-national sectarian Orange Order, who in Spain had proved his fealty both to the cause of Irish national liberation and of international solidarity; Paddy McDaid, whose battles before Jarama had included the defence of the Four Courts in Dublin during the Irish civil war in 1922; Charlie Donnelly, a student at University College, Dublin, a leader of the Irish Republican Congress, a young poet of great promise, who had interrupted his work on the life of James Connolly to go to Spain.

For the Irish the greatest loss was sustained in the death of Captain Kit Conway. More than 16 years before he had earned for himself the reputation of a tough guerrilla commander against both the British imperialists and the pro-treatyites in Ireland. An indomitable opponent of fascism, he joined the Communist Party of Ireland and was well known in many parts of his country for his fighting opposition to the blueshirts. Because of the pogrom atmosphere in Ireland against the defenders of Republican Spain, many of the volunteers had to leave the country quietly. But Conway, an

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the 13th Brigade*, Madrid, 1938, pp. 58-61.



active member of the Building Workers' Section of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, on the day of his departure addressed his fellow workers on the construction job where he worked. He explained what was happening in Spain, saying: "Sooner than fascism should win there, I would leave my body in Spain to manure the fields."

In March 1937 many of the Irish who had been wounded on the Jarama, like Peter Daly of County Wexford, arrived at the base in Albacete, where new recruits were being formed into a unit. This was the Anglo-American Company, which had sections of Americans, Latin-Americans and a section composed of Irish and British. This company was attached to the 20th Battalion.

Two Irishmen, Peter Daly and Paddy O'Daire, were lieutenants in the Anglo-American Company, which took part in the fighting at Pozoblanco. After four months on the Southern Front they were returned to Albacete for the purpose of rejoining the reorganised 15th Brigade.

From July 6 to 26 the Irish volunteers took part in the battle of Brunete, where they lost Thomas Morris; two comrades from Belfast, William Laughran and William Beattie; the Dubliner William Davis; and Michael Kelly of Ballinasloe. Another Irishman, George Brown, who was a leading figure in the communist and working-class movement in Manchester, was shot by the fascists as he lay wounded on the roadside. After Brunete, when there was a further reorganisation of the various battalions of the 15th Brigade, Peter Daly was appointed commander of the British Battalion. During the capture of Quinto on the Aragon Front, he was seriously wounded and later died in a hospital in Benicasim.

Four months later, at the battle for Teruel, three more Irish volunteers were to lay down their lives. They were Peter Glacken, Francis O'Brien and David Walshe, a lad from Ballina in the west of Ireland.

In Aragon during the fascist offensive that began on March 9, 1938, Ben Murray, a Belfast worker, died a hero's death in an attempt to stop the advancing Franco troops.

On the same front, Frank Ryan, now with the rank of major and adjutant of the 15th Brigade, was taken prisoner by the Italian fascists. They lined him up on the road with all the other prisoners and with bayonet-prods tried to force him to give the fascist salute. Ryan with a proud bearing refused. Under the threat of death they persisted in their efforts, but he continued to treat them with contempt. They then placed him in front of a firing party and proceeded to enact the motions of an execution. He still remained adamant. They did not kill him—as one of the senior officers considered that such a ranking officer of the International Brigade was a prize that could possibly be exchanged for one of the Italian fascist officers captured by the Republican

# FASCIST WARSHIPS IN DUBLIN BAY!

**AT** the end of July two Italian warships are announced to arrive in Dublin Bay — on a so-called courtesy visit.

Not long ago a German Nazi training ship came here. Why this anxiety of the dictators to show 'friendship' to this country?

Such friendship is not well-meaning. These visits of the fascist naval forces are part of the plan to spread fascist propaganda in an effort to arouse a friendly feeling among the people of this country for dictators. With poison gas and bombs from the air, Mussolini's Blackshirts murdered and plundered the people of Abyssinia and robbed that country of its independence. When Hitler seized Austria, Mussolini supported him, though he had guaranteed to maintain Austrian independence.

The Irish people, who have fought so hard for freedom, can have no friendship for Fascism — either Italian or German — which is today a menace to world peace.

**BOMBS FROM  
THE AIR**



**HOUSES WRECKED**



**CHILDREN  
MURDERED**



**CITIZENS OF DUBLIN, PROTEST AGAINST  
THIS FASCIST PROPAGANDA VISIT**

**NO  
TRUCK  
WITH  
FASCISM**

**FOR** two years the people of Republican Spain have fought against the combined forces of Mussolini and Hitler.

Barcelona, Madrid, Bilbao, Tortosa and other centres in Spain have suffered the horrors of air raids. Mussolini openly boasts that he is sending the airplanes, bombs and pilots responsible for the cruel warfare against the women and children of Republican Spain.

This is supposed to be a civil war. It is nothing of the kind. The Spanish people are fighting for liberty against a foreign Fascist invasion.

Frank Ryan, Republican fighter and leader of the Irish Unit, International Brigade, is now a prisoner in a Franco jail. Italian officers control Franco territory and it is they who hold Frank Ryan prisoner. **DEMAND HIS RELEASE!**



The people of Dublin can extend no welcome to the warships of Mussolini—the user of poison gas, the betrayer of Austria, the bomber of Spanish women and children and the jailer of Frank Ryan.

A poster issued by the Irish anti-fascists protesting against the Italian warships' visit to Dublin and demanding the release of Frank Ryan from a Franco prison



forces. Frank Ryan was taken to the concentration camp at Mora del Ebro, and later to the prison of San Pedro de Cárdenas, where the fascist gaolers tried to break him with torture. They failed. He was transferred to the Burgos Central Prison, where a court-martial sentenced him to death. A committee consisting of prominent personalities was formed in Ireland to campaign for his release. In this they did not succeed, but the fascists had to commute the death sentence to 30 years' imprisonment.

In 1937 and 1938 new volunteers arrived to fill the gaps in the ranks of the Irish. The new and veteran Irish fought, alongside the British, Americans, Canadians, Cypriots and others who made up the 15th Brigade, in the crossing of the Ebro and in the subsequent battles on the Sierra Pandols. There the Irish Roll of Honour gained new names: Jimmy Straney, Maurice Ryan and Paddy O'Sullivan, the senior officer of No. 1 Company of the British Battalion.

On September 22, 1938, two years after the first Irish anti-fascist had come to Madrid, the last two Irish deaths in action took place. They were Liam McGregor, a young political commissar and leading figure in the Communist Party of Ireland, and Jack Nalty, officer of a machine-gun company, who had come in the first group with Frank Ryan. Fascist bullets ended the life of men who had been active in the Irish Republican, trade-union and communist movements.

The withdrawal of the International Brigades in September 1938 ended the period of service of the Irish anti-fascists in the ranks of the Spanish People's Army. In December they set out for home. They had fulfilled the pledge of solidarity and had redeemed the honour and freedom-loving traditions of the Irish people. Their struggle was a natural expression of traditional links between the Irish national liberation movement and the cause of international solidarity.

Compared numerically with the contributions of other countries to the International Brigades, that of Ireland was not large, but the difficult political conditions under which the Irish joined the movement must be borne in mind. Of the 127 Irish volunteers who came to Spain 55 laid down their lives. Irish newspapers rarely reported the death of an Irish fighter of the International Brigade. Records of their struggle and heroism could only be found in the progressive weekly *Irish Democrat*.

During the Second World War four of the Irish veterans fought in the ranks of the anti-Hitler forces: Paddy O'Daire, who rose to the rank of major; Alec Digges, who is now prominent in the Association of the International Brigade and Friends of Republican Spain; Michael Lehane, who was killed in a Norwegian transport during a clash with the enemy; Paddy Roe MacLaughlin.

Those who returned home encountered many difficulties caused

by the unemployment that had gripped Ireland. For an anti-fascist fighter home from Spain the prospect of finding work was extremely doubtful. Nonetheless, many went back to their homeland and continued the struggle.

For instance, Donal O'Reilly resumed his trade-union work. He is now a member of the Executive Committee of the Irish Plasterers' Union and of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions.

Jim Prendergast went back to his post in the Irish Communist Party and later worked among the Irish emigrant workers in Britain. At present he is a leading figure in the National Union of Railwaymen.

Paddy Duff, who was one of the first Irish volunteers in Spain, became a fulltime official in the Workers' Union of Ireland. Michael O'Riordan, Johnny Power and Paddy Smith spent the war years in an Irish internment camp. James F. O'Regan and Liam O'Hanlon served nine years of penal servitude in British gaols for Irish Republican activity. Hugh Hunter resumed his tireless work as an activist in the Irish communist movement. Peter O'Connor served as a Labour Councillor in his native city of Waterford. Others, like Frank Edwards and Tom O'Brien, continued to serve in the Irish progressive movement.

In the long run, thanks to the efforts of the former volunteers, the truth about Spain became known to the Irish people. Indicative of this was the protest evoked by the "friendly" visit of Italian fascist warships to the Port of Dublin in 1938. The fascist officers had to flee the streets in face of a demonstration of workers singing *Bandera Rossa*. The song had been brought to Dublin by Irish members of the International Brigade who had borrowed it from the Italian Garibaldi Brigade.

One of the main tasks of the men who had returned from Spain was to secure the release of Frank Ryan from Franco captivity. For



Michael O'Riordan, an Irish internationalist volunteer, now the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland



this purpose, as we have already noted, a committee was formed which organised protest rallies and actions. In an attempt to damp down the campaign the De Valera Government gave false assurances that Frank Ryan was being well looked after in Burgos. Only in later years was it revealed that he had been taken from Burgos to Germany and that he died in Dresden on June 10, 1944. Today he lies buried in the soil of the German Democratic Republic and his grave is tended by former German comrades of the 11th Brigade.

As the fascist attack on the Spanish Republic had its sharp reverberations in Ireland in 1936, so will the present courageous struggle of the Spanish people against Francoism have its effect on Ireland that has still not secured full national independence. For that reason solidarity with Spain is inalienable from the struggle of the Irish people for national freedom. Many of the Irish people, once duped by the flow of reactionary propaganda, now display a vital interest in the developments in Spain. The real issues of the war of 1936-39 have become clearer to them. For instance, they see the growing unity between Communist and Catholic workers in Spain and hear that a number of churches have become organised centres of resistance to the Franco regime.

Though reaction is still very strong in Ireland, none of its champions would now dare to call a public meeting of support for Franco. None of them celebrated the 30th anniversary of the generals' revolt. On the other hand, the Connolly Youth Movement, which was founded in 1964, honoured the anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish people's national-revolutionary war by a public lecture. The Laurentian (Catholic) Society of Trinity College, Dublin, organised a symposium on the Spanish war. The symposium was attended by Peadar O'Donnell of the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic, and Michael O'Riordan, former member of the International Brigade. Solidarity with the Spanish students is displayed by the Irish Union of Students. These changes in the context of Ireland are a good measure of the impact of the Spanish people's continuing struggle against Francoism. They are also a vindication of those who, at the cost of their lives, fulfilled on behalf of all the Irish people their internationalist duty on the battlefields of Spain.

The anti-fascist traditions of the Irish Unit of the International Brigade are alive today in a new generation of fighters. They live on in the Irish Communist Party, in the Irish labour and trade-union organisations, in the Republican movement and in the Connolly Youth Movement formed to advance the ideals of national and social liberation and international solidarity.

## ITALY

Italy's war with Abyssinia ended formally in May 1936 with the capture of Addis Ababa. This was a great triumph for fascism, not so much militarily as politically. The fascist leaders presented their African adventure to the masses as a campaign undertaken by Italy, wrongfully deprived, in order to ensure a reasonable standard of living for its people. This propaganda device, based on the nationalist slogan of the "great proletarian" rising up to win himself "a place in the sun", was no new one. It had first been used in 1911, not without a certain degree of success, during Italy's war with Turkey over Libya. At that time the effect of this imperialist slogan on the masses was weakened, thanks to anti-militarist demonstrations by proletarian organisations.

In 1935-36 the propaganda efforts of the fascist leaders and their war of annexation with Abyssinia were supported by the hypocritical policies of the League of Nations and the Government of the United States. The "sanctions" against the aggressor announced by the Western powers did not, in fact, impede the conduct of the war in any way whatsoever: strategic war material continued to be sold to the Italian Government, and Italian transport ships carrying troops and arms crossed the Suez Canal as did the ships of the Italian Navy to the coast of Africa, freely. Moreover, the declarations of protest from the governments of the Western "great powers" against Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in no way affected the friendly relations between them and the Italian fascist state.

Surrounded by the aura of military victories and success in foreign policy fascist demagogic propaganda assumed vast proportions in Italy. The hardship of the people, made more acute by the economic crisis of 1931-32, was used by Mussolini to deceive the masses with promises of the future prosperity of a great fascist empire. The policy of aggression pursued by Italian fascism was supported by the top hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the petty-bourgeois elements, and also the representatives of the leading pre-fascist political circles. Only the vanguard of the working



class and a few political groups hostile to the fascist regime were not taken in by the nationalist slogans.

An appeal by the Italian Communist Party published in its central organ *Lo Stato operaio* in October 1935 stated that "one of the most tragic aspects of the situation which has arisen in Italy is that the people do not know the true state of affairs and the real course of events".

Nevertheless, in spite of the fascist propaganda and terror, which reigned in Italy in those years, 1936 heralded the beginning of an upsurge in the anti-fascist movement in Italy. "The great wave of renovation", to quote Palmiro Togliatti, which the Seventh Congress of the Comintern injected into the international working-class and communist movement, stimulated the Italian Communist Party to take the initiative in applying the tactics of the united front. Unity of action between Italian emigre Communists and Socialists was strengthened. One result of this united action was the convening of a congress of Italians in Brussels on October 12 and 13, 1935, attended by 371 delegates from Europe and America, the representatives of all anti-fascist groups regardless of political and religious persuasions. The congress's appeal to the workers of the world ended with the demand: "Immediate peace with Abyssinia! Down with Mussolini!"

During this period in France under the influence of the growing success of the Popular Front more favourable conditions had been created for the legal functioning of Italian emigre anti-fascist organisations, which had previously been victimised and repressed by the French police. The victory of the French Popular Front gave a new impetus to the activity of anti-fascist forces in Italy. The struggle of the French workers exerted an influence on the broad masses and their experience was used in the revolutionary work not only of the Communists, but also of other underground groups.

The events that took place in Spain in the summer of 1936 had a particularly strong impact on the development of anti-fascist feeling and the opposition movement in the masses. From the very first days of the fascist military revolt the Italian workers demonstrated their solidarity with the Spanish Republic. Anti-fascists, particularly those in France and Belgium, began to raise funds to aid the Spanish people. By the middle of August the Committee of Aid had collected 38,000 francs.

In Italy itself, in Rome, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Modena and other towns, there were demonstrations of solidarity with the Spanish people, leaflets were distributed and the slogans "Long live Caballero!" and "Down with Mussolini!" appeared on the walls of buildings. The Communist Party organised the raising of funds for the Spanish Republic. The underground newspaper *Unita* reported that 100,000 francs had been collected in a month.

Interest increased in the events taking place in Spain. The number of people listening to underground anti-fascist radio stations grew each day. Italian Communists broadcast daily programmes for them from the radio stations of the Communist Party of Spain and the United Socialist Party of Catalonia giving detailed accounts of the events in Spain and the Spanish people's heroic struggle for independence and denouncing the criminal policy of intervention pursued by Mussolini.

One can get a general idea of the extent of Italian intervention in Spain from a statement made by Count Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, at a meeting with Hitler in 1940, to the effect that Italy had spent 14,000 million lire on the Spanish war. After lengthy negotiations with Franco this sum was halved in the bill presented to the Spanish Government.

According to the Italian press, over the whole period of the war Italy dispatched to Spain 1,930 cannon, more than 7,500,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, about 250,000 small arms and 324 million rounds of ammunition for them, 10,135 automatic guns, 7,663 motor vehicles, and 950 tanks and armoured cars. Franco's fleet was supplemented by 91 Italian warships and submarines. Ninety-two transport ships of the Italian Navy supplied troops and arms to the insurgents. Five thousand, six hundred and ninety-nine officers and men and 312 civilians of the Italian Air Force were engaged in the military operations. They carried out 86,420 combat missions and 5,318 air raids, dropping 11,584 tons of bombs. In addition to the aeroplanes of the Italian Air Force participating in the intervention Mussolini provided the insurgents with 763 fighter aircraft and 1,414 aircraft motors.

The semi-official Italian newspaper *Forze armate* announced on June 8, 1939 that a total of one hundred thousand officers and men of the Italian regular army and the fascist militia (black-shirts) supplied with all the necessary arms and equipment, took part in the war against the Spanish Republic. There are grounds for assuming that the true strength of the Italian expeditionary forces in Spain was at least one-and-a-half times larger.

Reports of Italian intervention in Spanish affairs appeared in the world press simultaneously with reports on the generals' revolt in Spain. On July 15, 1936, three days before the revolt, Mussolini signed the first decree on the dispatch of Italian aircraft to Spanish Morocco to land General Franco's African troops in Spain.

In the following weeks and months from Gaeta (near Naples) and other Italian ports the ships *Lombardia*, *Sardinia*, *Sizilia*, *Liguria* and *Toscana* set sail for Spain carrying arms, ammunition, troops and military instructors, and the Fiat, Caproni and Savoia Marchetti fighter squadrons left Milan and other towns to support the military operations of the Spanish insurgents. The island



of Mallorca was to all intents and purposes occupied and turned into the main base for Italian aircraft to carry out operations against Republican troops and the civilian population.

Italy's armed aggression against the Spanish Republic was no chance military adventure, but part of a general policy of military expansion dictated by the interests of Italian imperialism—their desire to turn the Mediterranean into an Italian lake.

As early as 1934 the Italian Government had begun talks with representatives of the Spanish monarchists and financed their subversive activities against the government of the democratic Spanish Republic, promising them its support in the form of money, men, aircraft and military supplies in the event of open conflict.

The armed intervention by Italian fascism against Republican Spain was not popular with the mass of the Italian people. The mounting scale of the military operations demanded increased mobilisation to supplement the Italian expeditionary forces, the number of dead and wounded rose, and the growth in military expenditure seriously affected the position of the working people. All this intensified discontent among the Italian public. Its sympathies were with the Spanish people. News of Italians fighting for freedom on the side of the Spanish Republic strengthened this feeling and stimulated the activities of anti-fascist groups and organisations. Arrests became more frequent. Special fascist tribunals sentenced many anti-fascists, primarily Communists, for propaganda activities in support of the Spanish Republic and for helping Italian volunteers to cross the border illegally.

Solidarity with the Spanish people grew steadily and rallied all the Italian anti-fascist forces. On August 25, 1936, the Communist, Socialist and Republican parties signed an agreement to take joint action in giving aid to Spain. Later, on December 31, 1936, these parties launched a joint appeal against the fascist intervention: "All troops must leave Spain!" Thus unity of action by all Italian progressive forces was achieved for the first time on the Spanish fronts in the armed struggle against fascism.

Italian anti-fascists living in Spain as political emigres immediately joined the People's Militia to fight against the insurgents. Ettore Gualtieri (Pablo Bono) took part in organising the 5th Regiment of the People's Militia, set up by the Communist Party of Spain. He was later appointed corps commissar when the units of the regular Republican Army were set up. Vittorio Vidali (Carlos Contreras), leader of the Spanish section of the International Red Aid, was commissar of the 5th Regiment from the moment it was formed.

In persistent fighting with the fascists in the Sierra de Guadarrama in the summer of 1936 divisions of the 5th Regiment halted the insurgents' advance on Madrid. Guido Giacobini, Fernando



Luigi Longo and Vittorio Vidali with Italian volunteers

de Rosa and many other Italians lost their lives in these early battles for the capital.

The death of Fernando de Rosa, an active member of the Italian and Spanish socialist youth movement, who took part in the Asturian rising in 1934, was a particularly sad loss for the Italian anti-fascists. He died in command of the October Youth Battalion.

The first Italian volunteers from abroad arrived in Spain in August 1936. They were political emigres who had been living in France. After joining the 22nd Centuria of the People's Militia, set up in the Karl Marx Barracks in Barcelona, they engaged in battle with the fascists on the Aragon Front. One of the first to lay down his life was the Communist Paolo Comida at Tardienta on August 22.

Another group of Italian volunteers arrived on the Aragon Front at the end of August. It consisted of several hundred men of varying political convictions under Carlo Rosselli, the leader of the *Giustizia e Libertà* emigre anti-fascist organisation in France. The group consisted of a machine-gun company and a rifle company. The Republican Mario Angeloni was killed in their first battle near Monte Pelato (Bald Mountain) and five other Italians died with him. Angeloni was a famous lawyer in Italy who used to defend members of workers' organisations before fascist tribunals, for which he himself was arrested and sentenced.



At the same time a group of Italian volunteers was fighting on the Northern Front, defending the town of Irun against the troops of the rebel General Mola. Many Italians laid down their lives on the battlefield, including the Communists Remigio Maurovic and Alberto Donati and the Socialist Pietro Bertoni.

After the fall of Irun the volunteers first retreated to France and then returned to Spain. Together with other Italian volunteers they formed the Gastone Sozzi Centuria, named after an Italian Communist who was killed in prison by the fascist police. This centuria fought on the Madrid Front as part of the Catalan Libertad Column of the People's Militia. It consisted of 86 Italians, 29 Poles, 10 Frenchmen, one Dane and several Belgians. Its commander, Antonini, and commissar, Francesco Leone, were both Italian volunteers.

Apart from the above-mentioned formations and military detachments in which most of the Italian volunteers fought, there were small groups of Italians in other detachments of the Aragon People's Militia and regular units of the Republican Army. For example, ten Italian volunteer pilots were attached to the Republican Air Force at the beginning of the war. On September 30, in an air battle over Toledo the pilot Giordano Viezzoli was killed, who had been sentenced by the fascist tribunal in Italy to six years in prison for his activities in the Italian Republican Party. Another Italian pilot, the Communist Primo Gibelli, who had come from the USSR, lost his life on a combat mission near Madrid that same autumn.

The thoughts and feelings of the Italian volunteers were well expressed by Luigi Longo in a speech delivered in Madrid on September 18, 1936, on the presentation of the banner of the Italian Communist Party to the 5th Regiment. He said:

"The thousands of Italian anti-fascists now languishing in fascist prisons are with you heart and soul. The cause for which they have sacrificed their freedom, and some their lives, is the same cause for which you are fighting. They wanted to give their people bread and work, symbolised by the ears of corn and the hammer embroidered on our banner, and for which you too are striving. Today the people of Spain are fighting for free labour against exploitation, for freedom against oppression, for civilisation against barbarianism. . . . Therefore your struggle is the struggle of all peoples who are striving for peace, freedom and a better life.

"Italian fascism, the exploiters and oppressors of the Italian people, are acting together with the enemies of the Spanish people, to whom they are sending arms, aircraft and their own pilots. But the Italian people are with you, soldiers of freedom, with all their hearts! . . . Hundreds of Italians are requesting the honour of being recruited into the ranks of the People's Militia,

in order to fight with you for freedom. This is why the banner which I am handing over to your regiment is not just a gift from the Italian Communist Party, but also an expression of the solidarity of the whole Italian people with Republican Spain. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In the autumn of 1936 the Republic's struggle against the rebels and interventionists assumed the character of a large war. The government of the Popular Front proceeded to form a regular army. Among the first military units of the new army to be organised were the International Brigades, which included both men from the various centurias and columns, and the anti-fascist volunteers who were arriving from many countries.

One of the first regular international units was the battalion named after Giuseppe Garibaldi, Italy's national hero. It was formed in Albacete in October, when large numbers of Italian volunteers began to arrive there from France, Belgium, Switzerland, San Marino, America, the USSR and Italy itself. The battalion consisted of more than 500 men whose ages ranged from 18 to 50, with varying social backgrounds and political affiliations: Communists, who were in the majority, Socialists, Republicans, members of the *Giustizia e Libertà* group, and many politically unaffiliated, including a considerable number of Catholics. The battalion commander was Randolfo Pacciardi, a leader of the Italian Republican Party, and its political commissars were Antonio Roasio, a Communist, and Amedeo Azzi, a Socialist.

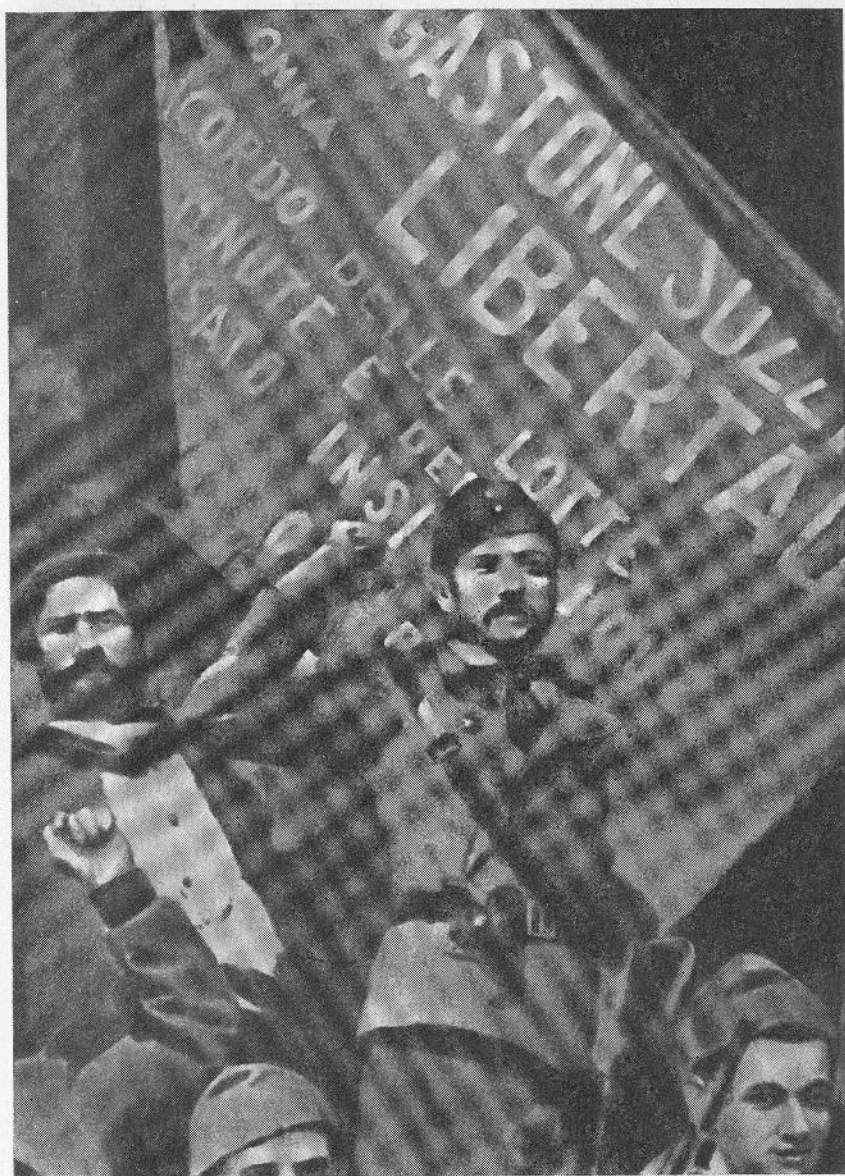
Thus the battalion's composition and leadership reflected the alliance and unity of the main political forces in the Italian anti-fascist democratic movement. This unity was preserved throughout the Spanish war. Other members of the Garibaldi Battalion were the Italian Communist Party leaders—Palmiro Togliatti (Mario Ercoli), then a representative of the Comintern, Luigi Longo (Gallo), who was inspector-general of all the International Brigades, and the Italian Socialist leader, Pietro Nenni.

Out of a total of roughly four thousand Italian volunteers, 1,822 were Communists, 137 Socialists, 124 anarchists and 55 members of radical democratic parties. The largest group were those without party affiliations. It should be stressed that almost half the volunteers came from the working class.

On November 10, 1936, before it was fully formed, the Garibaldi Battalion was dispatched urgently as part of the 12th International Brigade under the command of General Máté Zalka (Lukács) and Commissar Luigi Longo to the Central Front where the 11th International Brigade, whose commissar was the famous Italian Communist Giuseppe di Vittorio (Mario Nicoletti), was already fighting. The battalion first took part in an attack on fascist positions in the Cerro de los Angeles to the south of

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Longo, *Le Brigate Internazionali in Spagna*, Rome, 1956, p. 27.





Volunteers from the Gastone Sozzi Centuria



Giuseppe di Vittorio (Nicoletti), commissar of the 11th International Brigade, among volunteers in Albacete

Madrid. The monastery on top of this hill, which had been fortified by the insurgents, was an important position on the eastern flank of Madrid's defence and commanded an excellent view of the roads leading to the capital and Getafe airport, as well as the airport itself which was in the hands of the fascists.

The brigade's attack was not successful, although the battalions, including the Garibaldi Battalion, fought their way to the foot of the hill. By the end of the first day's fighting it became clear that courage and determination alone were not enough to guarantee victory. What was needed was military training for the troops and efficient unit and combat organisation. The brigade lacked proper co-ordination between the command and the various units. Supply of ammunition and food and evacuation of the wounded were badly organised. The results of this lesson were evident six days later, when the battalion and the whole of the 12th Brigade, after rectifying most of these mistakes, went into action on another section of the Madrid Front, the University City. On November 19, the Garibaldi Battalion occupied a position near the San Fernando Bridge on the River Manzanares, and a few days later relieved the Polish Dabrowski Battalion on the section of the front up to the Puertas de Hierro Bridge. In constant fighting that lasted until November 26 and at the



price of heavy losses the fierce attacks by Moroccans were repulsed. Twenty members of the Garibaldi Battalion lost their lives and more than 150 were wounded.

From November 30 the Garibaldi Battalion was engaged in halting a fascist attack in the Pozuelo de Alarcón sector to the northwest of Madrid and launching a counter-offensive. In a letter to the battalion commander Pacciardi, General Kléber who was in command of the sector, wrote: "Thanks to the brilliant action of the Garibaldi Battalion after four days of resistance the enemy's heavy attacks supported by aircraft, artillery and numerous tanks, were repulsed, and our positions reinforced. The spirit of self-sacrifice shown by the Garibaldi Battalion rallied round it all the units defending Pozuelo". By December 9 when the 12th Brigade was withdrawn into reserve, the strength of the Garibaldi Battalion had been reduced by almost half—from 600 to 350 men.

In the middle of December the battalion received reinforcements from the constant stream of new Italian volunteers. The largest group, consisting of 310 men, was led by Guido Picelli, a Communist and former deputy in the Italian parliament, who had led the "proletarian defence" of Parma during Mussolini's notorious advance on Rome in 1922. It was he who had hoisted the Red Flag on the Montecitorio, the parliamentary building in Rome, on May 1, 1926.

In addition two companies were formed from newly arrived volunteers. One of them, under the command of Bocchi and Commissar Locatelli, was attached to the 14th International Brigade, and at the end of December, with the British Company and other units of the advance guard battalion of this brigade, joined battle with the fascists who were breaking through the front in the south of Spain in Andalucía. At the price of heavy losses—only 200 of the 600 men survived—the company and the whole battalion checked the enemy's advance, enabling the brigade's main forces to carry out their combat mission. A group of forty Italians was surrounded in the hills, captured by the fascists and shot. The other company of over 100 men joined with volunteers from the Balkans and Slav countries to form the Dimitrov Battalion in the 15th International Brigade, which was commanded by the Italian volunteer Major Penchienati in the battle of the Jarama.

After a small-scale operation at Boadilla del Monte on December 20 the 12th Brigade was transferred to the Guadalajara line on New Year's Eve with instructions to launch a surprise attack and drive the fascists back from the Zaragoza highway. The attack was successful and the Garibaldi Battalion gained possession of the village of Mirabueno. Company Commander Guido Picelli and eight other Italian volunteers lost their lives in this battle.

The year 1937 began with fresh heavy defensive fighting for

Madrid, in which the 12th Brigade took part. On January 3 the fascists, who had concentrated a large combat force, launched an offensive to the northwest of Madrid in the region of Las Rosas and Majadahonda with the aim of surrounding the capital from the north and cutting it off from Republican forces in the Sierra de Guadarrama.

February brought the Republic new difficulties. Extending the scope of his intervention in Spain, Mussolini concentrated an expeditionary corps in the region of Seville. The first objective of his military operations was the port of Málaga, which was defended by poorly-armed detachments of the People's Militia. On February 8 the Italians captured the town. But General Franco's main goal was Madrid. His plan was to strike simultaneously from the Zaragoza highway and the Jarama in the south, encircling and destroying the most efficient Republican troops and gaining control of the capital. On February 6 a large grouping launched an attack southwest of Madrid. The battle of the Jarama began. Like the January offensive on the northwest of Madrid, this large and bloody battle, in which as many as 40,000 troops fought on the side of the fascists, did not bring the enemy any success. The fascists were not able to advance more than four to six kilometres beyond the east bank of the Jarama. Over twenty Republican brigades took part in the fighting which lasted three weeks, including four International Brigades—the 11th, 12th, 14th and 15th. The increased organisation and combat efficiency of the units of the Republican Army helped them not only to repulse the fierce attacks of the insurgents' crack troops, but also to mount a counter-attack. The fascists lost half their men and their units were incapable of further offensive action.

General Roatta, Commander of the Italian expeditionary force, whose four divisions—the Black Flame, the Black Arrows, the Dio lo vuole and the Littorio Division—were concentrated in the Sigüenza area in February, was now faced with mounting an offensive on Madrid in order to defeat the Republican Army and take the capital with his forces alone. Like Franco, the Italian general was convinced that his 50,000 strong force would gain an easy victory over the weak Republican defence. Roatta confidently instructed his subordinates in the consecutive stages of this operation: "Tomorrow we will be in Guadalajara, the day after in Alcalá de Henares, and the day after that in Madrid!" By special command he conveyed Mussolini's blessing to his troops: "I am observing the course of the battle and am confident that the courage and perseverance of our legions will crush enemy resistance. May the legionaries be assured that I am following their operations which will be crowned with victory!"

At 7 a.m. on March 8, 1937, fifty guns of the Italian expeditionary force opened fire on the poorly-fortified positions of the





A group of volunteers from the Garibaldi Battalion. Second left (standing):  
Antonio Roasio

Republicans near Mirabueno and on the hills by El Marenchal. Simultaneously up to thirty fascist aircraft began bombing the Almadrones and Mirabueno areas. They were followed by twenty tanks and infantry. The small Republican units retreated. Thus began the Guadalajara operation. The fascist offensive caught the Republicans completely unawares.

On the night of March 9 the Garibaldi Battalion, numbering about 800 men, was brought up to close the breach in the Brihuega line. The Garibaldis with Commissar Ilio Barontini as acting commander (Pacciardi was on leave) received orders to occupy the hills north of Brihuega and hold their position until the brigade's other battalions arrived. In the meantime, however, the enemy had already succeeded in capturing Brihuega, and the Garibaldi Battalion joined battle with the advance guard of the Italian expeditionary force.

At the same time the 11th International Brigade was repulsing an enemy attack in the Zaragoza road area. The Garibaldis took their first prisoners, including a major in the Italian army. That night the first deserters from the Black Arrow Division arrived.

Next day the battle was resumed with renewed force. Roatta moved up two full-strength divisions, supported by all his artillery, to attack the two Republican brigades. Yet in spite of their vast numerical superiority, the fascists could not overcome the stubborn resistance of the brigaders. Republican tanks and aircraft dealt devastating blows to the interventionist columns. That day the fascists succeeded in advancing only six kilometres along the road, capturing the townlet of Trijueque, driving back the 12th Brigade slightly, and occupying a country house known as the Ibarra Palace.

On March 12 all four divisions of the expeditionary force went into battle. Two of them attacked the 12th International Brigade. Apart from the two International Brigades exhausted by two days of fighting and suffering from heavy casualties, the Republican Command could muster only three more brigades that had been hastily transferred from the Jarama Front, one tank battalion and the brave Republican airmen who attacked the enemy's mechanised columns from the air in the most difficult weather conditions. The International Brigades formed part of the group under Enrique Lister. On its left, to the north of the Zaragoza road, was the 12th Division under the Italian volunteer and Communist Nino Nanetti. The interventionists could not advance a step in the direction of Madrid. There was a drop in morale among their ranks, and more enemy soldiers surrendered, deserted or came over to the Republicans with their arms.

This low morale in the fascist troops was assisted by the intensive propaganda work among the enemy soldiers organised by Luigi Longo, Vittorio Vidali, Teresa Noce (Estella), Giuliano



Paietta (Camen), Giacomo Calandrone (Canapino) and the commissars of the Garibaldi Battalion. They dropped leaflets behind the enemy lines with the help of simple rockets and used loudspeakers to address enemy soldiers and get prisoners-of-war to describe the truth about the Spanish people's struggle.

The turning point came on March 13, when the fascists went over to the defensive. Units of Lister's Republican forces mounted a counter-attack along the Zaragoza road and freed the townlet of Trijueque. The next day the 12th Brigade under Brignoli attacked the Ibarra Palace. They advanced from two sides supported by artillery and five tanks. After fierce resistance the fascist garrison surrendered and the palace was captured by the Republicans. In this battle the Republicans destroyed two battalions of Italian fascists capturing 150 prisoners, several guns, about 300 rifles and a great deal of ammunition.

On March 18, after the re-grouping and training of the Republican units, the whole People's Army on the Guadalajara Front was put on the offensive, causing the fascist divisions to retreat hastily. On March 23 the battle of Guadalajara ended with the total rout of the Italian expeditionary force and the failure of Franco's new attempt to take Madrid. This victory was of great military and political importance. For the first time the republicans had beaten a well-equipped 50,000-strong fascist army. The hundreds of captured officers and men of the Italian expeditionary force, and the large number of documents, which were subsequently published in the press, were factual evidence of foreign intervention in the Spanish Republic. Mussolini's sole conclusion from the shameful defeat at Guadalajara was a decision to step up intervention in Spain.

An important military and political role in the battle of Guadalajara was played by the Garibaldis, whose heroism and self-sacrifice saved the honour of the Italian people. Alvarez del Vayo, Commissar General of the Republican Army, sent a telegram to the Military Commissar of the Central Front with a request to convey through Comrade Gallo his admiration and fraternal greetings to the men of the International Brigades, whose deeds would never be forgotten by the Spanish people, and particularly to the Garibaldi Battalion, which nobly symbolised the heroic struggle for freedom against fascism.

Many Garibaldis perished at the hands of Italian legionaries in the battle of Guadalajara, including the following: Beniamino Mudado, Domenico Mazza, Giovanni Tremul, Andre Leandro, Pietro Poletti, Gagliardo Delmiro, Giuseppe Javoli, Pietro Rivani, Francesco Jacopini, Fernando Morillo, Severino Bottagisi, Francesco Bret, Nunzio Guerrini, Plasido di Valerio, Giuseppe Carrara, Luigi Pinessi, Luigi Basso, Bernardo Falco, Prieto Cibrario and Alfredo Paternoster.

In April 1937 the Garibaldi Battalion was transformed into the 12th Garibaldi Brigade. Together with the Dabrowski Brigade it formed a divisional group under the command of General Lukács. After a short rest the 12th Brigade took part in two military operations in April, one on the Jarama and the other in the Casa de Campo near Mount Garabitas.

At the end of the month it was given leave and reinforced by Spanish troops and volunteers from the Italian company of the Dimitrov Battalion, the *Giustizia e Libertà* Column and the Antonio Gramsci Battery.

In June the 12th Garibaldi Brigade together with the Dabrowski Brigade and some Catalan military units, which included the Black-Red Anarchist Battalion under the Italian anti-fascist, Fausto Nitti, took part in an attack on Huesca on the Aragon Front. This operation was not successful. In some bloody battles from June 12 to 16 on the heavily fortified points of Cimillas and Allerre the Garibaldis lost many men including their battalion commander, the Republican Libero Battistelli, a man of high principles who had come to fight for freedom from Argentina where he had emigrated. The divisional commander, General Lukács (Máté Zalka), was mortally wounded at the beginning of the operation.

The following month the 12th Brigade took part in a large Republican offensive on Brunete. The brigade's skilful manoeuvring helped to capture the village of Villanueva del Pardillo on July 9 and a large number of prisoners and equipment, earning it the gratitude of Colonel Vicente Rojo, Chief of Staff of the Central Front. Sergeant Bruno Lugli was killed in this battle.

In the Brunete operation the old Italian revolutionary Vincenzo Bianchi (Krieger) took command of the 13th International Brigade, and Giuliano Paietta was appointed its commissar in place of the Yugoslav Blagoje Parović who was killed at the beginning of the fighting.

The battle of Brunete marked the end of a year of constant and heavy fighting for Madrid.

In August there was a change of command in the Garibaldi Brigade caused by Pacciardi's retirement. The reason for his retirement was the attitude adopted by Pacciardi and some of his supporters, mainly members of the *Giustizia e Libertà* on the organisation of the Italian volunteers and their participation in the national-revolutionary war in Spain. Pacciardi did not agree with the establishment of international units in the People's Army combining volunteers of many nationalities, including Spaniards, and supported by the whole international solidarity movement. He favoured the formation of an exclusively Italian military unit, with an autonomous command, on funds provided by Italian emigres. He even suggested that the battalion be disbanded in view of the protracted nature of the anti-fascist war in Spain



and the heavy casualties in his own brigade, which were becoming increasingly difficult to replace due to the obstacles created by the Non-Intervention Committee.

These views of Pacciardi's, which combined a narrow nationalistic outlook with lack of confidence in the Spanish people, were not shared by the vast majority of the Garibaldis. Together with him and his supporter, Major Carlo Penchienati, only twenty volunteers from the anarchists and Republicans abandoned the field of battle and left Spain. The unity and solidarity of the Garibaldis were not shaken. True to the ideals of working-class internationalism, as Luigi Longo wrote in his book *Le Brigate Internazionali in Spagna*, "they saw the war in Spain not only as the struggle of Spanish, French, or Italian anti-fascists, but as the struggle of anti-fascists the whole world over, in the outcome of which all anti-fascists shared an equally profound interest".<sup>1</sup>

In August the 12th Brigade took part in a large offensive operation on the Zaragoza sector of the Aragon Front, after which it remained on the front until February 1938, when it was transferred to Estremadura to take part in an offensive aimed at diverting a section of the fascist forces from the Teruel Front. In this offensive Captain Renzo Gua, a member of the *Guistizia e Libertà* organisation, was mortally wounded.

Shortly afterwards the brigade was sent back to the Aragon Front and arrived at Caspe where Republican troops were having difficulty in checking a large offensive by rebels and interventionists. Together with the remaining international and Spanish units which were still in combat condition, the brigade retreated fighting towards Gandesa, and then withdrew to the left bank of the Ebro in the Benifallet area. Alecsandro Vaia (Martino Martini), who had earlier fought on the Basque Front, was appointed the brigade's new commander. It was here that the last Italian volunteers joined the brigade.

Three thousand and two hundred Garibaldis—Italians and Spaniards took up defensive positions along a 30-kilometre stretch of the front. As in the other International Brigades, the number of Spanish men and officers in the Garibaldi Brigade had increased steadily in 1937-38. This was explained by the fact that there were not enough new Italian volunteers from abroad to make up for the brigade's losses in killed and wounded. Moreover, each month it became more difficult to cross the Franco-Spanish border and, particularly, the Italo-French border. Over the whole period of the war only 223 volunteers succeeded in crossing from Italy to Spain. As a result by the summer of 1938 Spaniards accounted for about two-thirds of the troops as a whole and no less than half its command personnel. In September a

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Longo, op. cit., p. 263.

Spaniard, Major Luis Rivas, a mechanic from Madrid, was put in command of the brigade.

When the Republican Army attempted to force a passage across the Ebro on July 25, the 12th Brigade continued to hold its defensive positions, and did not move up to the front line until September 3. For twenty days the brigade fought hard on the defence line in the Pandols Mountains near Gandesa. The command of the 45th Division praised its heroism, stating in an order of the day that "it showed itself to be the best force in the fighting on the Ebro".

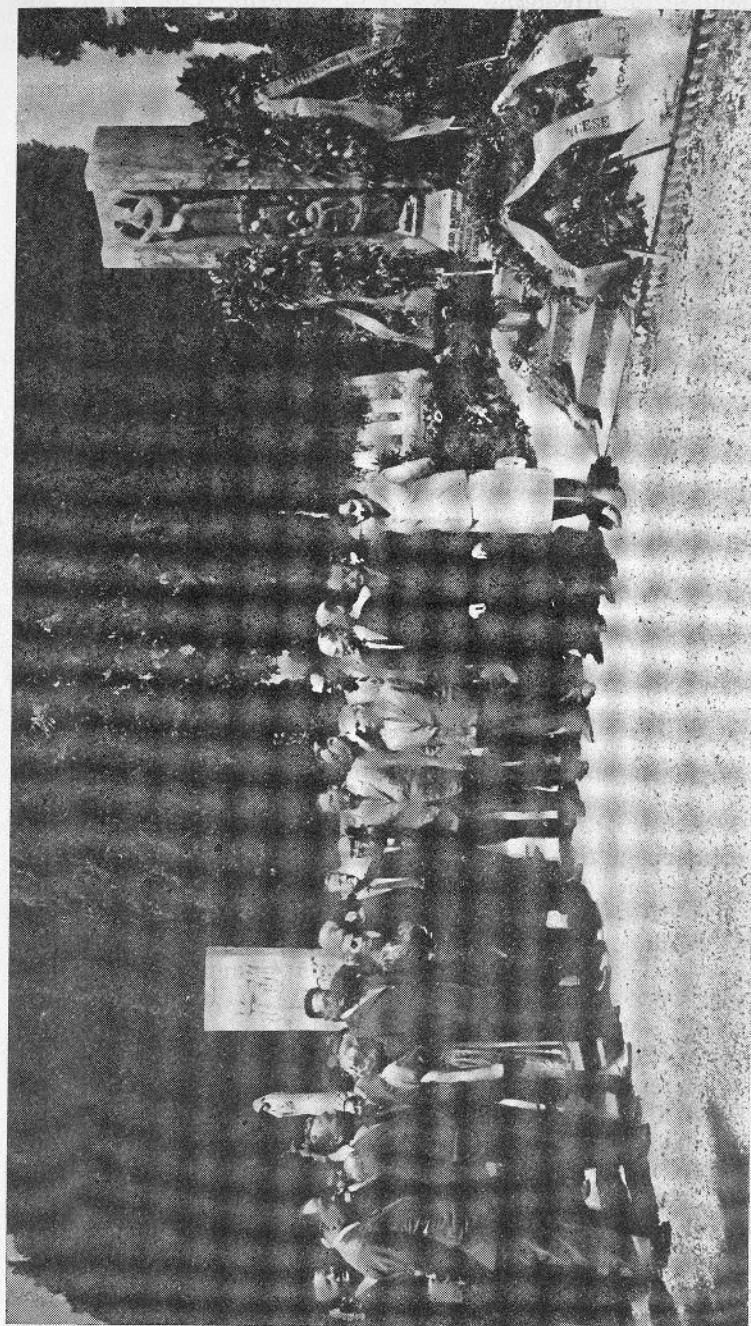
"I fought in the 1914-18 war as an officer in the German Army," said Colonel Hans Kahle, Commander of the 45th Division, in an interview published on November 18, 1938, in the Paris newspaper *La Voce degli Italiani*, "but I never saw such bitter fighting, such a mass of artillery and aircraft, concentrated by the enemy, as on the Ebro Front. There were several reports from the divisional observation post that the Garibaldi Brigade was in a perilous position. Yet each time the fascists attacked, the Garibaldis popped up miraculously out of the ground, from collapsing trenches and forced them to retreat, with heavy losses.... The Garibaldi Brigade displayed invincible courage and fortitude and surpassed in these battles all the feats it had performed previously in the fighting from Pozuelo to Guadalajara."

When the brigade was withdrawn from combat it had only 900 men left. It was then that the Garibaldis learnt of the Spanish Republican Government's decision to withdraw foreign volunteers from the Republican Army. When in the demobilisation centres of Torello and Calella at the end of January 1939, they again took up arms and fought together with a Spanish battalion for two days to cover the evacuation of civilians to France.

On February 11 the Garibaldis filed past their commander for the last time and crossed the Franco-Spanish border. Many of their comrades-in-arms were absent on this last march. No less than 600 volunteers were killed at the front or reported missing, which was the same thing, including 335 Communists; no less than 2,000 were wounded of which 861 were Communists; and no less than 100 were captured of which 23 were Communists. None of the latter ever returned. They lost their lives at the hands of the fascists.

In France the Italian volunteers—about 900 in all—were interned in the concentration camp at St Cyprien. They bravely suffered the deprivations and misfortune that fell to the lot of all volunteers who had gone to Spain from fascist or fascist-occupied countries. In the first few months about 100 people managed to escape from the camp. Most of the remainder were transferred to a camp at Vernet in 1941, then handed over by the Vichy





Veterans of the Spanish war at the ceremony of unveiling the monument to Ilio Barontini, commissar of the Garibaldi Battalion, in Livorno, June 1965

government to the Italian authorities and imprisoned on the small island of Ventotene near Naples.

In August 1943, two weeks before the truce was concluded between the government of General Badoglio and the Allied Command, they were released as a result of a powerful wave of strikes in the large industrial centres demanding peace and an amnesty. They then dispersed over the country and became the first organisers of guerrilla warfare.

The Garibaldis began to offer armed resistance to the nazis and Italian fascists even earlier. About 1,000 Italian patriots—former volunteers to Spain—took part in the French people's struggle for freedom. According to official statistics, about 100 Italians lost their lives in the struggle for the independence and freedom of France, in nazi prisons and concentration camps. An Italian section of a secret military organisation (whose chief-of-staff was Renato Bertolini, a captain of the Garibaldi Brigade) operated in the Buchenwald death camp, and took part in freeing the camp inmates before the arrival of American troops. Garibaldis also fought in guerrilla units in Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg and Yugoslavia.

In 1938 a former commissar of the Garibaldi Battalion, Ilio Barontini, left Spain for Abyssinia where, together with two other Garibaldi men, Bruno Rolla and Anton Uchmar (Oghen), he helped to organise the Abyssinian people's struggle for freedom against the Italian fascists. Returning to Europe, all three took part in the Resistance movement in France and Italy. Barontini and Oghen organised armed uprisings in the south of France, in particular, in Marseilles. Bruno Rolla, who remained in an Italian prison until the end of 1943, became one of the organisers of guerrilla warfare in the Abruzzo Hills. Later all of them and many other Garibaldis led the armed resistance against Italian fascism and the German occupation.

In 1943-45 Luigi Longo commanded Garibaldi units which numerically formed more than two-thirds of the whole 400,000-strong army of Italian guerrillas. Former brigaders Giuseppe Alberganti, Ilio Barontini, Rafaele Pieragostini, Anton Uchmar, Carlo Farini, Aldo Lampredi, Antonio Roasio, Francesco Leone and Alecsandro Vaia who were members of seven regional leading groups in the north and centre of Italy became recognised leaders of a general uprising, in which many other Italian volunteers of the Spanish Republican Army took part.

After the liberation of Italy from fascism the Garibaldis began to play an important role in the social and political life of their country. Their names can now be found among party and trade-union leaders of the Italian Republic.

The Italian Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, who played an active part in the anti-fascist war of the Spanish people, made



a profound assessment of the historical importance of international and Italian solidarity with the Spanish Republic in 1936-39. "If it is true that after 1939 the gloomy silence of the grave and prison descended on Spain, then it is also true that, although the battle was now being fought on another field, the aims had not changed. . . . If that first bastion had fallen without a struggle, the fate of the world and our country would have been a completely different one. It was on that battlefield that we got to know our friends and our enemies, the dangers and tasks common to all true democrats; it was on that battlefield that anti-fascist unity arose as a real and concrete school of war and politics, a school for peoples, for classes, for parties, for far-seeing statesmen."<sup>1</sup>

The spirit of anti-fascist unity and solidarity which stirred the troops of the International Brigades to heroic deeds and inspired the fighters of the Italian Resistance is still alive today in the struggle of new generations of the Italian people for peace, democracy and socialism.

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<sup>1</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, *Esperienza di Spagna*. "Risorgimento", Roma (s.a.), No. 2, p. 121.



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## NORWAY

The greatest problem of the Norwegian working class in the thirties was unemployment, which was particularly severe among the rural population and the young. Thousands of young people lost their jobs even before the economic crisis. Many had never had one. Hunger and poverty were constant guests in the rural areas.

The succession of reactionary bourgeois governments of Norway did nothing to ease the lot of the working people. On the contrary, their policies led to a further deterioration in the position of the workers and peasants. Naturally this provoked bitter opposition from the working people.

The radicalisation of the working-class movement in Norway in the early thirties exhibited itself in numerous powerful agricultural and industrial strikes. The unemployed set up their own militant organisations. Alongside the struggle for economic demands, the political struggle of the working class assumed ever-increasing proportions, aimed first and foremost against the growing fascist forces.

The political situation in the country became acute in the spring of 1932. The reactionary provocation of the working class by the Minister of Defence, Vidkun Quisling, attracted the attention of the whole country. Quisling, whose name became a synonym for treachery during the years of Hitlerite aggression, made a sensational announcement in February 1932 that a "Communist agent" had attempted to assassinate him. In spite of the fact that the parliamentary commission, which investigated this and other accusations made by Quisling against Left-wing parties and trade unions, acknowledged them to be fabricated or drawn from highly dubious sources, the government refused to hold the minister responsible. After retiring from his post in 1933 following the collapse of the Agrarian Party government, Quisling resurfaced a few months later on the political scene as the "Führer" of the new fascist party, the National Union.

<sup>1</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, *Esperienza di Spagna*. "Risorgimento", Roma (s.a.), No. 2, p. 121.







The first reactionary organisations of the pro-fascist type appeared in Norway in the twenties. These were the riflery clubs and nationalist "homeland unions". The greatest danger to the working-class movement at that time were the pro-fascist strike-breaking bands who operated mainly in the rural areas against the lumbermen's and agricultural workers' trade unions. The formation of the National Union in 1933 bore witness to the growth of dangerous fascist forces which were closely connected with the so-called democratic parties, particularly with the Agrarian and Right-wing Hyre parties.

Determined struggle against the fascist threat became the main task of the organised working-class movement. The Communist Party of Norway was the first to draw attention to this threat and strive to mobilise the working class for the struggle against fascism. However, its efforts to create a united front of working people were successful only at the level of the lower working-class organisations.

During this period the young people were particularly active. They broke up meetings of the National Union in working-class areas, organised protest demonstrations outside German consular offices, and picketed German ships in Norwegian ports. Anti-fascist slogans appeared on practically unscalable cliff faces, on the tops of factory chimneys and on German holiday steamers in Norwegian fiords and harbours. The authorities responded to these actions with a wave of arrests and trials.

In the Social-Democratic youth movement at this time an anti-fascist Left-wing had been formed, which established contact with the Communist youth. Numerous representatives of the radical intelligentsia also joined in the anti-fascist movement.

This growing social protest against fascism became the basis of the Norwegian working people's movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, when the latter was invaded by the joint forces of Spanish and world fascism.

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The liberation movement of the Spanish people greatly influenced the activities of anti-fascist forces in Norway. The winning over of broad sections of the population to the cause of aiding the Spanish Republic assumed proportions unparalleled in the country's history and became a truly popular movement, the influence of which was felt for many years to come, including the period of the Second World War.

The "non-intervention" policy of Britain, France and the United States obstructed normal relations between democratic Spain and the countries of Europe and America. The Social-Democratic government which came to power in Norway in 1935 likewise did not dare pursue a policy which conflicted with the interests

of the large capitalist states. Norwegians were forbidden to leave the country as volunteers for Spain. It was also forbidden to supply the Spanish people with war material and to transport military cargoes to Spain.

The Norwegian people refused to submit to a policy which amounted to a blockade of Republican Spain. Aid to the Spanish people assumed two forms in Norway. One was of a military nature and, naturally, could be implemented only against the law. The other consisted of sending parcels of medicine, food and clothing for the civilian population, primarily for the thousands of Spanish children who were in great distress, and medicaments for the front. This type of aid, in spite of considerable difficulties, could be effected within the law.

In the autumn of 1936 the Association of Norwegian Trade Unions (AFL) began to raise funds for aid to Spain. In a short time, by November 24, 1936, more than 100,000 kroner had been collected. A considerable part of this sum was handed over to the International Committee of Aid to the People of Spain. The remainder was used to purchase dressings and clothing which were sent to Spain directly from Norway.

In November of the same year the AFL suggested setting up a Norwegian Committee of Aid to the Spanish People on a broader base: its membership included representatives of many organisations. The Committee immediately set about raising funds on a large scale. The first consignment, dispatched at the end of November, contained dressings, anaesthetics and surgical instruments. Between November 1936 and March 1937, 24,000 ampules of morphine, 20,000 packets of dressings, 150 kilograms of pure iodine and 80 sets of surgical instruments, as well as some large consignments of clothes, were sent to Spain.

The Committee's activities were enthusiastically supported by the working people of Norway. It was soon able, together with the Swedish Committee of Aid to Spain, to cope with the important task of setting up a well-equipped modern hospital on the territory of the Republic. The hospital was opened in the premises of a technical school in the industrial town of Alcoy, 100 kilometres south of Valencia. It originally had 125 beds, but was later expanded to 650.

The hospital personnel—doctors, nurses and other staff—was fifty per cent Norwegian and Swedish. On May 19, 1937, the hospital admitted its first patient, and on September 20 it was handed over to the Republican Government which expressed its deep gratitude for the aid that had been given. The Committee continued to send the hospital essential equipment and instruments that were difficult to acquire in Spain.

The Norwegian Committee also gave considerable aid to the children of Spanish refugees. In collaboration with the Spanish



authorities several children's homes and hospitals were opened. Three children's homes and a children's hospital with 300 beds were equipped in the fishing town of Oliva near Valencia. Another children's home was situated in Casa de la Playa and financed by the Bergen Aid Committee, and another—in Casa de la Montaña—was financed by Oslo municipal workers. The Fridtjof Nansen Children's Hospital received financial assistance from the Oslo Aid Committee. In addition, the Norwegian Committee of Aid to Spain played an active role in setting up numerous recuperation centres for the wounded in various parts of Republican Spain.

The Norwegian Committee sent regular consignments of food-stuffs to the Spanish civilian population, mainly cod-liver oil, vitamin preparations and fish products. In 1937 and 1938, 1,000 kilograms of cod-liver oil were sent to Spain fortnightly and 100,000 vitamin tablets each month. Large consignments of food-stuffs were also dispatched there (for example, 110,000 kilograms of dried cod in December 1937), and shortly afterwards followed one of the largest shipments—10,000 kilograms of lard, 10,000 kilograms of cod-liver oil, 30,000 tins of sweetened condensed milk, 12,000 kilograms of dried milk, 90,000 kilograms of sugar and 170,000 bars of soap.

The Committee of Aid to Spain collected about two million kroner in Norway. After the defeat of the Spanish Republic, the Committee's activities were directed towards giving assistance to Spanish refugees in France.

Of great importance for the Spanish people's struggle was the transportation of war material purchased by the Spanish Government, which was organised by the Norwegian Communists in conjunction with their Swedish and Danish comrades. Norwegian vessels carrying arms and ammunition in their holds made hazardous voyages to Spanish ports. Norwegian sailors signed on specially to take part in these voyages. This aid was particularly vital in 1937-38 when the French-Spanish border was closed.

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The Communist Party of Norway, which initiated all forms of public assistance to the Spanish people, did not restrict itself to committee work. In response to the desire of Norwegian anti-fascists, particularly the young, to offer armed resistance to fascism and join the militant struggle of the Spanish people, the Communist Party set up a centre at the end of 1936 for the selection and dispatch of volunteers to Spain. By this time several Norwegian sailors had left their ships in Spanish ports and, on their own initiative, joined in the war against the insurgents as members of the International Brigades.



International brigaders charge the enemy

By the beginning of 1937 the first Norwegian volunteers had left Norway for Spain. The authorities did all they could to prevent their departure. In conjunction with fascist informers the police organised periodic round-ups. Most of the Norwegian volunteers were Communists and members of the Young Communist League. They were also joined by volunteers with other political affiliations.

The exact number of Norwegian volunteers who fought in Spain and laid down their lives for the Republic is not known. According to existing information, about 400 Norwegians fought in the International Brigades, but only a few of their names are known. For security reasons lists of volunteers were destroyed immediately after the occupation of Norway by Germany on April 9, 1940.

The Gestapo immediately set about hunting down and executing former participants in the Spanish war, on the assumption that they would play an important part in the Resistance movement. They were not mistaken. The people who had fought in Spain were staunch, ardent anti-fascists, fighters for the freedom and independence of their country, with a great deal of practical experience. Many of them were put in German concentration



camps and died there. Others were permanently invalidated as a result of the hardships they had experienced in Spain and the subsequent horrors of the death camps. But all those who survived continued to fight against the Nazi invaders. As we know, the nucleus of the largest Norwegian underground militant group was composed of former members of International Brigades.

During the Spanish war hundreds of members of the solidarity movement were active in Norway, writing explanatory articles, giving public addresses and devoting themselves to organisational questions. While it is impossible to mention them all, we should like to refer to those who became particularly well-known for their fine work.

Lise Lindbaek first went to Spain in December 1936 and stayed there for eighteen months. Later, in connection with the work of assisting Spanish refugees, she went to France. From 1937 to 1938 she was permanent correspondent of the *Dagbladet*, a liberal newspaper. During and after the civil war she gave many lectures in Norway, Sweden and Denmark and wrote a number of books on Spain.

The eminent Norwegian anti-fascist writer Nordahl Grieg went to Spain twice. His reports from there were later collected together in the book *Spansk Sommer* (Spanish Summer). In 1936-37 a great deal of space was given over to the events in Spain in his anti-fascist magazine *Veien Frem* (The Way Ahead). His famous novel *Ung må verden ennu være* (*The World Is Yet to Be Young*) is also mainly about the war in Spain. Together with the Danish writer Martin Andersen-Nexø he initiated many mass rallies of young people in the Scandinavian countries in 1937 and 1939. He died in December 1943.

Viggo Hansteen played an important role in organising the transportation of military consignments to Spain. Together with his Swedish and Danish comrades he sought out vessels and crews who would undertake this dangerous work of penetrating into Spanish ports with a cargo of arms and ammunition. Hansteen was shot by the Gestapo in Norway in September 1941.

Gerda Grepp, correspondent for the Social-Democratic newspaper, the *Arbeiderbladet*, was the first Norwegian journalist in Spain. From 1937 to 1938 she represented the Spanish Government's press department Agence Espagne in Paris. She also lectured in Norway and Sweden. She died in Norway in 1940.

Just Lippe worked as correspondent of the *Arbeideren*, the newspaper of the Norwegian Communist Party, in 1936. In November of that year the Party made him responsible for the transportation of volunteers and arms to Republican Spain.

Ottar Lie, party secretary on organisational matters, led the campaign to recruit volunteers for the International Brigades and helped to organise their departure from Norway. His closest assis-

tant in this work was Erling Tendeland. Ottar Lie was arrested by the Gestapo and executed in 1943.

Nina Haslund Gleditsch and Kristian Gleditsch played an active part in organising the campaign to aid Spain. They kept the Norwegian working people informed of the true situation there and appealed to them to help in the Spanish people's noble struggle against fascism. Together with many other Norwegian activists they raised funds for the Spanish Republic.

Such was the contribution of the Norwegian anti-fascists to the Spanish people's heroic struggle for freedom.



## POLAND

The growth of fascism in Europe in the thirties reflected the desire of the bourgeoisie in most of the European states to weaken the democratic forces, crush the revolutionary working-class movement, and launch a "crusade" against the USSR. Fascism, particularly after the coming to power of Hitler's party in Germany in 1933, set up hotbeds of aggression and war, threatening the sovereignty and independence of other peoples, particularly the smaller states including Poland.

The ruling circles in Poland could not or would not recognise this threat. On the contrary, the class interests of the Polish ruling classes and their fear of socialism and the working masses determined the rapid evolution of the "cordon sanitaire" regime bequeathed by Pilsudski towards fascist totalitarianism. In the sphere of foreign policy the Polish Government began to seek for close collaboration with fascist Germany from 1934 onwards, closing its eyes to the threat which fascism posed to the national interests and the very existence of the Polish people.

This line in domestic and foreign policy met with growing opposition from the broad masses of the people, particularly the working class. In the mid-thirties Poland was the scene of stormy working-class protest and was one of the countries with the highest number of strikes and strikers. A profound impression on the public consciousness was made by the "Bloody Spring" of 1936 when bitter class collisions took place in Cracow, Lvov and Czestochowa and the blood of workers was shed. In the rural areas, which suffered particularly as a result of the agricultural crisis, unrest swelled into a massive peasant strike in August 1937. Public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of political changes, the establishment of a democratic regime in the country and the introduction of extensive social reforms. Even the ruling clique went through a profound internal crisis during this period, particularly from 1935 to 1937.

The regime, weakened and having lost its authority in the eyes of the people, was able to remain in power only thanks to the lack of unity in the democratic opposition and the opportunist tactics of its leaders. Consequently the efforts of the Communist Party of Poland were directed towards uniting the various democratic forces attaining agreement and collaboration with the Polish Socialist Party and the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe).

The policy of the Popular Front, proclaimed by the Communist International and pursued by the Communist Party of Poland, had the support of Left-wing forces in the socialist and peasant movements, but met with stubborn opposition from the leaders of the two above-mentioned parties, who systematically rejected the agreement platform proposed by the Communists.

As a result the Polish Communists did not succeed in setting up a Popular Front. Despite the illegal conditions and severe repression, however, they did manage during this period to attain certain partial successes, extending their influence on the working class and creating support in the countryside and among the democratic intelligentsia.

In summer 1936 Polish political life was characterised by a fierce struggle between reaction and democracy, and within the latter between the supporters and opponents of a Popular Front. It is not surprising that in this situation the fascist revolt in Spain produced such strong repercussions in Poland, accelerating the polarisation of social and political standpoints. The Polish working masses welcomed the victory of the Popular Front in France and Spain and followed carefully the struggle of these countries' progressive forces against fascism and reaction. When the Franco revolt against the Republic flared up in the sultry days of July 1936, Polish public opinion was practically unanimous in condemning it as an attempt by reaction to frustrate the successful development of democracy and deal a blow at the Popular Front, an attempt to restore a monarcho-fascist regime in that country.

All the reactionary and pro-fascist forces, particularly the ruling circles, the Catholic Church and the chauvinist National Party, came out in support of the insurgents. A smear campaign against the Spanish Republic, which was accused of all manner of crimes and foul deeds, was begun in the press and continued throughout the war. Polish supporters of the Republic also became the victims of crude attacks and persecution; any action aimed at giving aid to the Spanish people was equated with anti-state activity. The clergy also carried on propaganda in support of the insurgents. The Polish Government officially announced its neutrality in relation to the Spanish events, but in fact all its actions were aimed at helping the insurgents and fascist invaders in Spain. Polish diplomats in the Non-Intervention Committee and the League of Nations as a rule voted for anti-Republican resolutions



and maintained secret contacts with General Franco's "junta". For many months 140 monarchists and fascists and members of their families found refuge in the Polish Embassy in Madrid. A Francoist delegation carried on semi-official activities in Warsaw, run by the former Spanish envoy who betrayed the Republic, Francisco Serrata, and his son Juan. Moreover, the authorities allowed the insurgents to purchase Polish arms and took no measures to prevent the transit conveyance of foreign arms through the ports of Gdynia and Gdansk (Danzig).

The attitude of democratic forces in Poland to the events in Spain was quite different. A solidarity movement with the heroic Spanish people of unprecedented scale for the period between the two wars developed in the masses under the slogans of internationalism and international anti-fascist solidarity.

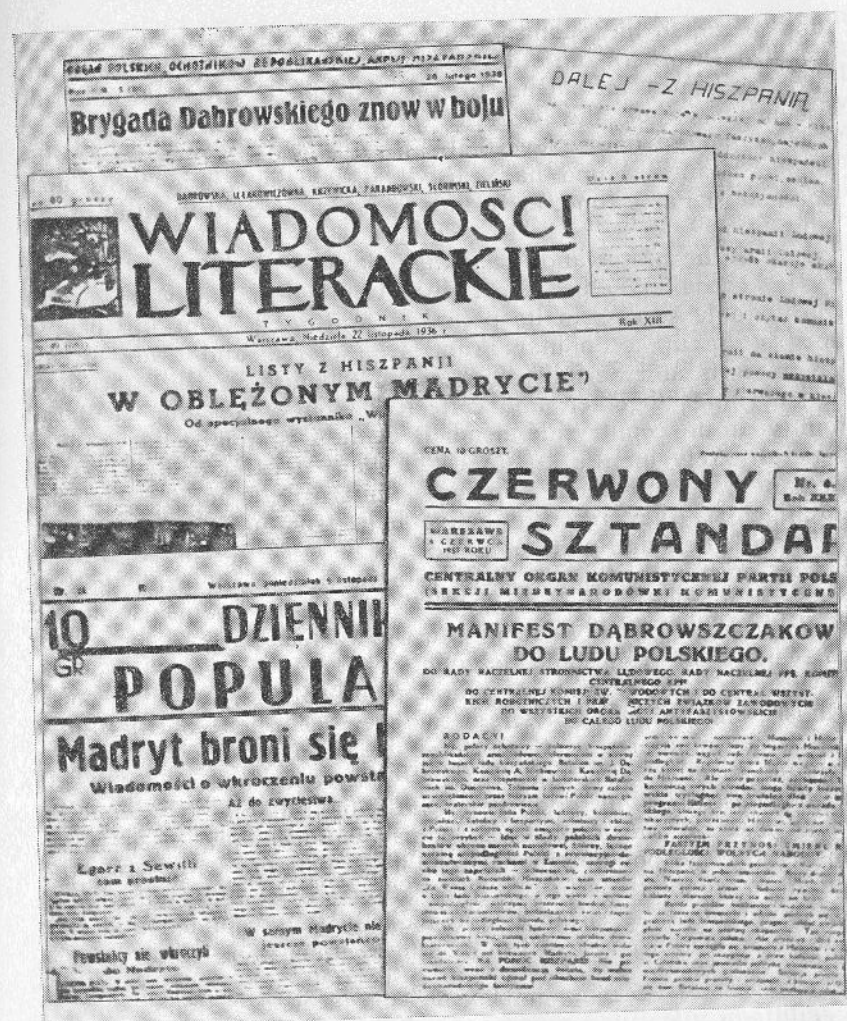
July and August 1936 saw a great wave of workers' rallies, conferences and meetings throughout the country, which passed resolutions of solidarity with the Spanish working people. This movement was inspired and organised for the most part by the Communists who tirelessly informed people of the truth about the civil war in Spain, making extensive use of both legal and illegal forms of activity. The Polish Socialist Party and the largest association of trade unions, which it controlled, also came out in defence of the Spanish Republic. The fact that even the government-orientated trade unions expressed their support for the Spanish Republic is indicative of the mood of the working class.

The *wojewoda*, or governors, frequently wrote of the vast scale of "Spanish" meetings and rallies in their monthly reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In August 1936, police dispersed over 100 young miners who had gathered outside the Spanish Consulate in Katowice and sent a delegation to the consul requesting him to furnish them with Spanish visas for the purpose of joining the Republican militia. In the same month reports began to appear in the press about young workers being arrested by the Polish border guards as they were trying to leave the country illegally for Spain.

The movement of solidarity with the Republic, which expressed the internationalist and anti-fascist feelings of the working people, was furthered by a growing anxiety in the masses over the fate of their native land before the threat of an attack by German fascism.

The Polish Communist Party organ *Wiadomości* wrote in August 1936 that "the triumph of Hitler's Spanish mercenaries would mean a considerable strengthening of nazi positions in Europe and, consequently, a growth in the threat to Poland's independence". Many Socialists and members of the radical wing of the Peasant Party and even some conservative, liberal and Catholic circles took the same view of the war unleashed by the fascists in Spain.



Progressive Polish newspapers which supported Republican Spain

One of the important activities of the solidarity movement was the raising of funds to help the Republic by progressive trade unions throughout the war. The fund-raising campaign was carried on in exceptionally difficult circumstances, in view of the various obstacles created by the authorities, the frequent arrests of the fund-raisers and the confiscation of donations. Alongside the semi-legal raising of funds which was actively supported by Communists, the Polish Communist Party organised its own illegal



fund of aid to the Spanish people, which included donations not only from workers and other sections of the urban population, but also from peasants. Due to the extremely difficult material circumstances of the working people the contributions were usually modest ones. Nevertheless by the end of 1938 the trade-union "Spanish" fund had raised 80,000 zlotys and the Polish Communist Party fund, according to incomplete information, even more.

It was the propaganda campaign around the Spanish question in 1936-39 that helped the Polish Communist Party to attain considerable success in its policy of uniting the working people and setting up a Popular Front. In factories and trade unions Communists and Socialists organised "Spanish" rallies, meetings and evenings together, and collected money for the Republic jointly. In the countryside members of the Communist Party could generally rely on the assistance of many local members of the Peasant Party in their "Spanish" enterprises, and within the intelligentsia they received active help from people of varying political beliefs and philosophies of life.

One must mention the great role in this broad campaign of solidarity of the Polish working masses with the Spanish Republic that was played by Polish emigrants in various parts of the globe, particularly in France and Belgium.

Most of them were miners and metalworkers, mainly Communists, and people who were active members of the Polish colony and trade-union organisations. The Polish emigrants in France and Belgium together with other workers played an active part in all the demonstrations of solidarity with the fighting Spanish Republic. They paid for the upkeep of Spanish children, organised fund-raising for the population of Republican Spain, cared for the families of volunteers in the International Brigades, giving them constant financial assistance, and looked after wounded and sick volunteers who arrived in France for treatment and rest.

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One of the finest pages in the history of the Polish mass movement in defence of the Spanish Republic is the participation of international volunteers in the military operations of the Republican Army.

From the very first days of the uprising the Polish friends of the Spanish people sought to aid them by personal participation in the struggle.

Thanks to the efforts of the Communist Party of Poland, and also of the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, and the Polish Section of the French Communist Party, Polish volunteer units were set up and later traversed the glorious path of battle shoulder to shoulder with their Spanish brothers.

The Polish Communist Party set about recruiting in autumn 1936; there were thousands of volunteers. As well as Communists, Socialists, members of the Peasant Party and others without political affiliations expressed the wish to go to Spain. But only a small proportion of them managed to get there, for the journey was fraught with great difficulties. The conspiratorial conditions and the illegal crossing of several frontiers called for exceptional tenacity, stamina and self-sacrifice. With the help of the Communist parties of Czechoslovakia, Austria and Switzerland transport routes were organised across the Polish-Czech frontier, then (more often than not illegally) across the frontiers of Austria, Switzerland and France. On arrival in Paris the anti-fascists made contact with French and Polish Communists and were then taken in groups across the Pyrenees into Spain. Occasionally the final stage of the journey was made by sea.

Many Polish anti-fascists who did not manage to contact the recruiting organisers or did not want to wait made their own way to Spain. Volunteers often travelled across Czechoslovakia hiding in the pneumatic equipment under railway carriages. Sometimes with help from dockers and sailors in Gdynia they managed to get over to a French port by concealing themselves in a ship's hold. They were often arrested by the police of the country through which they were passing. Nevertheless about 800 anti-fascists from Poland fought in the ranks of the Republican Army. They were only a small part of the Polish volunteers in Spain, however, the majority consisting of Polish emigres.

The exact number of Polish volunteers is difficult to establish but it was certainly not less than 5,000, including several hundred volunteers who arrived in Spain from the United States, Canada, South America and other countries.

The emigre volunteers were mainly heavy industrial workers, particularly miners and metalworkers. The group from Poland consisted primarily of workers who were active members of the Polish Communist Party and the Communist Union of Polish Young People. About 25 per cent of the emigres from France and Belgium were Communists, the rest being politically unaffiliated, with the exception of a small number of members of Socialist and other parties.

The first groups of Polish volunteers (predominantly miners) arrived in Barcelona from France in August 1936. One of these groups fought on the Aragon Front in the Thaelmann Centuria. The second—nine men led by Franciszek Palka—took part in the heroic defence of Irún near the French border. Yet another group consisting of 36 men formed the Dabrowski machine-gun unit under the command of Stanislaw Ulanowski in the Libertad Column of the Catalan People's Militia. At the beginning of September the Libertad Column was engaged in heavy fighting at



the approaches to Madrid. The volunteers in this unit, Stanislaw Ulanowski (Bolek) and Stanislaw Matuszczak (Henri), who were members of the leadership of the Polish groups of the French Communist Party, the metalworker Antoni Kochanek, and the political activist in these groups, Viktor Kuźnicki (Pawel Szkli-niarz), an emigre miner, played an outstanding role in the organ-isation and fighting of the Polish international formations.

In October 1936, when larger groups of volunteers arrived at the International Brigades' base in Albacete, the first Polish battalion was formed, known as the Dabrowski Battalion, which formed part of the 11th and later the 12th International Brigade. After some brief military training this battalion of about 750 men was sent to the front at the beginning of November under S. Ula-nowski. When he was wounded command of the battalion went to a Bulgarian volunteer, Major Ferdinand Kozovsky (Petrov).

At the same time the Dabrowski cavalry squadron consisting of Poles and other Slavs appeared on the front. In December 1936, a Polish regiment named after Adam Mickiewicz went to the Teruel Front as a unit of the multinational Chapayev Battalion of the 13th International Brigade. The regiment was commanded by the emigre Stefan Niewiadomski.

With the arrival of new volunteers and the growth of the Republican Army, new formations of Polish men and officers were gradually set up.

Between April and June 1937, the 12th International Brigade under the Hungarian General Lukács (Máté Zalka) was reformed into the 45th Division. The Polish and Hungarian battalions became the core of the Dabrowski Brigade known first as the 150th and later, in September 1937, as the 13th. The brigade's first commander was the Spanish anti-fascist Fernando Gerasi, and its commissar, S. Matuszczak.

In July 1937, Polish volunteers and Spanish fighters were formed into an international battalion named after Jose Palafox, hero of the Spanish people's war of liberation against Napoleon. The commander of the new battalion was Jan Tkaczow, a captain in the Polish Army Reserve and an active member of the Polish Communist Party who was popular among the peasants. Its com-missar was Nikolaj Dwornikow (Stanislaw Tomaszewicz), secre-tary of the Young Communist League in West Byelorussia.

The third battalion of the Dabrowski Brigade was the Mátyás Rákosi Battalion composed of Hungarians and Spaniards (Com-mander Ákos Hevesi [Pal Niebuhr], Commissar Imre Tarr). Up to October 1937 the Brigade also had a Franco-Belgian battalion led by Emile Boursier (commander) and Armand Maniou (com-missar). After the formation of the third Polish-Spanish battalion named after Adam Mickiewicz (first Commander Boleslaw Molo-jec, Commissar Wasyl Lazowy) in November 1937, these four



The banner of the Dabrowski Battalion

battalions remained in the 13th Brigade until the end of the war.

The friendship that grew up between the Poles, Spaniards, Hungarians and French excluded any friction on national grounds.

Ties of warm friendship also linked the Poles with represen-tatives of other nationalities in the Polish state. The Palafox Battalion included a Ukrainian-Byelorussian company named in honour of Taras Shevchenko, the great Ukrainian poet and revo-lutionary democrat. Another company in this battalion was predominantly Jewish and bore the name of Naftali Botwin, a young revolutionary sentenced to death by a bourgeois Polish court for killing a provocateur.

Apart from the Dabrowski Brigade and its above-mentioned units, a considerable number of Polish volunteers fought in the batteries named after Bartosz Glowacki, a hero of the Kosciuszko rising of 1794 and W. Wróblewski, a general of the Paris Commune.

At various times there were other Polish units in certain inter-national and Spanish formations, such as the Thaelmann Battalion, the staff company of the 14th Brigade, and a battalion of the 86th (mixed) Brigade. The volunteer Tadeusz Ćwik (Wladyslaw Stop-czyk) was commissar of the 45th Division and deputy corps com-missar. Wacław Komar commanded the 129th International Brigade set up in early 1938.



In addition Poles formed a considerable group in the medical corps attached to the International Brigades, in which more than twenty Polish nurses and pharmacutists gave devoted service. Out of a total of 250 doctors 41 were Polish, including 20 battalion doctors and 4 head doctors of brigades. The head doctor of the 35th Division was Mieczyslaw Domański-Dubois, a Communist who was active in the anti-fascist movement and popular among the French intelligentsia. He died on the Aragon Front during the storming of Quinto. Sigfrid Beer, Leon Samet and Andrzej Lorski also worked in the medical service.

Gustaw Reicher (Rwal), member of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party and its representative on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain in 1937, enjoyed considerable influence among the Polish volunteers. With his help Polish officers and commissars managed to solve political and organisational problems which arose in the Dabrowski Brigade.

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Polish volunteers took part in almost all the major military operations. In victories and defeats, in the most difficult of conditions, the ranks of steeled anti-fascist troops, internationalists and patriots, were formed and their political and military experience grew. On November 9, 1936, at the beginning of the decisive battle for Madrid, the Dabrowski Battalion and the other divisions of the 11th Brigade marched into battle in the area of the University City and the Casa de Campo, drove the insurgents back over the Manzanares in a decisive counter-attack and withstood heavy fascist offensives for several days. The heroic defence of the Casa de Velasquez brought glory to the 3rd company which bravely defended its positions and lost a great number of men. The battalion also took part in offensive actions at Humera and Aravaca and then again in the Casa de Campo and Boadilla del Monte. By the end of December it had only 300 of its 600 troops left.

From November 1936 to January 1937 the battalion command changed several times. When S. Ulanowski and Antoni Kochanek were wounded it went to Viktor Kuźnicki, but he was soon replaced by Kochanek who was discharged from hospital urgently at his own request. Less than a fortnight later Kochanek was killed in action at Almadrones and Kuźnicki again took command.

The Polish Mickiewicz Company, which distinguished itself in the storming of the fortified town cemetery in Teruel during the December offensive of Republican troops on this front, also suffered heavy losses (about 100 killed and wounded).

The reason for these heavy casualties was not only the vast technical superiority of the insurgent troops, but also the lack of military experience of the volunteers and their officers. In this



The Dabrowski Battalion at the Madrid Front. December 1936

situation the morale of the internationalists assumed even greater importance. The group of volunteers who on November 21, finding themselves surrounded by the enemy in a small house in the Casa de Campo, fought to the last bullet under a hurricane of fire from enemy tanks and flame throwers and were nearly all killed, will remain forever a symbol of selfless heroism. Deputy Battalion Commander André, a Frenchman, Stanislaw Wroclawski, a machine-gun company commander, and Leon Inzelsztein, a company commissar, lost their lives and S. Ulanowski and Piotr Wasiluk were heavily wounded.

In the middle of December 1936, the Polish Battalion, now consisting of only about 300 troops but still combat-worthy, was withdrawn into the reserve of the Madrid Front. This gave it an opportunity to partially replenish its numbers with newly-arrived Polish volunteers from Albacete, and also with a Balkan company under the command of the Bulgarian volunteer Nikola Marinov (Khristov). The respite did not last for long, however, and at the end of the month the battalion was dispatched to the Guadalajara Front to launch a local offensive operation. On January 3 the Dabrowskis, supported by the Garibaldi Battalion, attacked enemy positions at Almadrones and took the town, capturing prisoners, arms and other trophies. The joy of victory was clouded by grief: the battalion commander A. Kochanek died a hero's death in action.



In February 1937, the battalion took part in the battle of the Jarama lasting for several days, in the course of which the fate of Madrid was again decided. There was particularly heavy fighting on February 13 when the enemy mounted a fierce assault strongly supported by artillery and tanks. A critical situation arose for the Dabrowskis when the defence in the neighbouring sector was broken and part of their battalion found itself attacked simultaneously by Moroccan cavalry in the rear and by tanks and infantry in front. The surrounded volunteers resisted to the last grenade and then engaged in hand-to-hand combat. One of the heroes of the day was Tomasz Stelmach; severely wounded, he summoned up the strength to throw a grenade which blew him and the approaching fascists.

Towards the end of the battle, in which Kuźnicki was wounded, command of the battalion was assumed by Józef Strzelczyk (Jan Barwiński), a Lodz metalworker and active member of the Polish Communist Party. The reinforcements which arrived at this time made good the casualties. The battalion, which had previously consisted exclusively of Polish volunteers, was reinforced with troops of other nationalities. It received the Ambiente Company of the People's Militia, which had been through some very heavy fighting and was composed of volunteers (Commander Bernabe Vera, Commissar José Lacierra).

In the March fighting on the Guadalajara line the battalion carried out the important mission of covering the right flank of the 12th Brigade and the entire main group of Republican forces, which was commanded by Enrique Lister. The volunteers went into battle without having time to rest after three weeks of fighting on the Jarama. Guadalajara is remembered by those who took part in it not only for the courageous fighting of the Republicans against vastly superior enemy forces, but also for the exceptionally bad weather. The constant rain, sleet, strong wind and freezing cold were the cause of widespread sickness among troops who lacked warm underclothes and the requisite clothing and were lying in shallow, boggy trenches. More than half of them caught colds and 20 per cent got frostbite in their arms or legs. Nevertheless, when the Republican forces launched a counter-offensive on March 18, which resulted in the total defeat of the Italian interventionists, the Polish Battalion mounted a frontal attack and seized the enemy positions, being among the first to enter the town of Brihuega, which was a key point for the whole front. By the end of the day the Dabrowskis had captured several dozen prisoners, and a great deal of arms and military equipment. Their own losses on this occasion were insignificant.

The next month brought fresh success to the Republicans—this time on the Southern Front. The Polish Mickiewicz Company and the Chapayev Battalion took part in an offensive in the Pozoblanco

area, where they distinguished themselves in a victorious attack on the towns of Valsequillo and Granjuela.

After Guadalajara the Polish volunteers and the whole 12th Brigade enjoyed a lull of about two months, broken occasionally by operations of localised importance on the Jarama and by the Casa de Campo. This period was given over to intense military, political-educational and organising work. The international units, including the Dabrowski Battalion, like the rest of the Republican Army, went through the stage of discarding their guerrilla-type habits of the early period and getting organised as regular army units. General Walter, who was particularly affectionate although exacting towards the Polish volunteers, described this process a year later as follows: "Last year on my first and only visit to what was still the Dabrowski Battalion the casual familiarity there was most perceptible, military discipline was not wholly satisfactory, and arms were kept in an appalling condition. Today it (the brigade.—*Ed.*) gives the impression of a closely-knit disciplined collective, with a highly developed sense of military comradeship and mutual confidence in action."<sup>1</sup>

Additional organisational problems arose in connection with the formation of the new Dabrowski International Brigade; the composition of the brigade's staff and the operation of its services, the military and tactical training of its officers, unification of arms in all units and learning to use new types of weapons. Special care was taken to abolish inequality in the material well-being of the units, which had arisen during the period when the battalions enjoyed great autonomy and many questions were solved through the initiative and enterprise of their commanders.

In these new conditions the role of the commissars and the system of political and educational work of which they were in charge became even more important.

Generalising the political and military experience which they had acquired over the months of heavy armed combat with the fascists, the volunteers issued a manifesto to the Polish people, the text of which was discussed at meetings in all the units. In it they explained the aims of the Spanish people's struggle, described the motives which had impelled them to join the Republican Army and urged Polish working-class and democratic organisations to unite in a Popular Front: "Tomorrow the fascist bands, encouraged by the impunity with which their foul deeds have been met, may raise their brown hand, in accordance with Hitler's programme, against the independence of the Polish people... encroaching on our natural riches, on which German imperialism has long been sharpening its teeth... Each man must remember that the cause of Spain is the cause of Poland."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Istorichesky arkhiv*, No. 2, 1962, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Polacy w wojnie Hiszpańskiej 1936-1939*, Warsaw, 1963, p. 201.



At the beginning of June 1937, when the brigade was still in the process of being organised, it fought as part of General Lukács' division in an offensive against Huesca, the aim of which was to divert part of the enemy's forces and ease the position in the Basque country. In spite of the heroism and self-sacrifice of the Republican troops, the offensive failed. The Dabrowski Brigade, which attacked enemy fortifications in the Cimillas sector, lost almost a third of its men, including company commander Karol Sznurawa, the brave medical orderly Józef Major, Dabrowski Battalion Adjutant Adam Dawidowicz, the volunteer Wacław Górecki, Sergeant Andrzej Kijak, Corporal Ignacy Wasiun, and Hungarian Battalion Commissar Imre Tarr. The death of General Lukács, divisional commander and Hungarian internationalist, beloved by all, was a severe loss for the volunteers.

After Huesca the Dabrowski Brigade received reinforcements in the form of one thousand freshly mobilised Spanish troops. The volunteers were now in a minority in the brigade, and this posed new problems for the brigade command. Above all it was necessary to change over to Spanish for training, management and documentation, but this necessitated rapid mastery of the language, and the training and promotion of Spanish command personnel. Veterans of the former Ambiente Company were appointed to the posts of officers and commissars, and special training courses were set up. The volunteers gave the Spanish troops a warm welcome and took a brotherly interest in their welfare.



Volunteers of the Dabrowski Battalion after the victory at Guadalajara.  
March 1937



At a meeting of the Dabrowski Brigade (left to right): Brigade Commander Strzelczyk, Commissar Matuszczak, General Swierczewski and a representative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, Rwał

In July 1937, the brigade took part in a successful operation to capture Villanueva del Pardillo, and then withstood many days of heavy fighting in the La Mocha sector. It was here that the reformed Palafox Battalion received its baptism of fire. In the very first engagement it repulsed an attack by Moroccan infantry, inflicting heavy losses on it. During the operation there was a change of command in the brigade: the sick Gerasi was replaced by Strzelczyk (Barwiński), and W. Komar took command of the Dabrowski Battalion.

At the end of August 1937, after a brief period on the positions of the second echelon, the brigade took part in the Republican offensive on the Aragon Front. The two Polish battalions—the Dabrowski and the Palafox—distinguished themselves by their great daring and valour in this operation. Under cover of night they advanced well behind the enemy's lines, reaching the town of Villamayor de Gallego, a few kilometres off Zaragoza, overpowering several small units which they encountered on the way and capturing several dozen prisoners and military equipment. Both battalions lacked support from other units, however, and soon found themselves surrounded. They managed to fight their way



back to their initial positions, and their military exploit was praised in a special order of the day of the 45th Division.

On this occasion too the brigade suffered heavy casualties, particularly the two battalions who had operated behind enemy lines. The Dabrowski Battalion lost Boleslaw Krzykalski (Stefan Wisniewski), commander of the first company, Stanislaw Bielecki, battalion adjutant, Józef Rubinsztein, active member of the Polish Communist Party, Stefan Kozlowski ("the Canadian"), commissar of the fourth company, Pawel Wiśnia (Pol), G. Czyra, Adam Maksymiuk ("Junker"), Boruch Nysenbaum (Bobruś) and many others. These military operations by the brigade and the whole 45th Division tied part of the enemy's forces and assisted Republican successes on other sectors of the Zaragoza Front, where Quinto, Codo and Mediana and the heavily fortified town of Belchite were liberated from the insurgents. The 35th Division under the Polish General Karol Swierczewski (Walter) played a major role in these victories.

The brigade spent the autumn of 1937 in the front reserve and only once, in October, took part in an offensive of localised importance in the area of Fuentes de Ebro. Thus the Dabrowskis got their first long respite. These were months of intense studying, which included not only marching drill and exercises but also tactical field exercises, manoeuvres and classwork. The political commissars set in motion a great variety of activities, including the abolition of illiteracy among the Spanish recruits.

During their stay in Aragon the brigade established close and friendly relations with the civilian population. In the various towns and villages—Samper de Calanda, Binéfar and Vinaceite—where the battalions were stationed, special get-togethers were organised for the troops and the inhabitants nearly every day. At these meetings speeches were made by volunteers, Spanish troops, and representatives of the local authorities and various anti-fascist organisations, and at the end the children were given presents: condensed milk, underwear, toys, or sweets usually bought with money collected by the troops.

The brigade's commanders and commissars did all they could to ensure that the Spanish troops and the civilian population looked on the volunteers as their brothers who were serving the Republic for profoundly ideological, internationalist and patriotic considerations. This was particularly important in Aragon and Catalonia, where certain political circles, especially anarchist ones, were initially suspicious of the organisation of International Brigades in Spain. Anarchist extremists tried to present the International Brigades as an armed force seeking to win power for the Communists. But the brigade only had to spend even a short time in a place for prejudices of this kind to give way to strong affection.

In December 1937, the Dabrowski Brigade took up positions on

[illegible]

*The Volunteer of Freedom*, the newspaper of the Polish international brigade



the Tardienta-Suera sector of the Aragon Front. At the beginning of February 1938, it was transferred to the Southern Front and in the middle of the month as part of the 45th Division it took part in an offensive operation in the Estremadura province. The brigade launched a fierce attack and captured the enemy's positions with 130 prisoners and trophies. The victory was shortlived however. On the same day the enemy concentrated a large number of forces, part of which managed to attack the Republican troops from the rear. Lacking any substantial reserves, the internationalists were forced to withdraw under cross fire. The Shevchenko Company and other units were cut off by Moroccan cavalry. Many volunteers lost their lives in the unequal battle, including the commander of the Palafox Battalion, Jan Tkaczow, Commissar N. Dwornikow (Tomaszewicz), and the commissar of the Mickiewicz Battalion, a Spaniard by the name of Llamas. The wounded included the Dabrowski Battalion Commander F. Ksieżarczyk and many other men, officers and commissars. (In all the brigade had 38 killed, 116 wounded and 174 missing as a result of this operation.)

At the beginning of March 1938, without having time to make good the losses incurred in Estremadura, the brigade was again dispatched to the Aragon Front where the enemy had mounted a large offensive. For the whole of this month it fought rearguard actions as part of the 35th Division, in the general retreat on the Aragon Front. At Belchite, Alcañiz and Caspe, at Lerida and Balaguer, the brigade's battalions frequently managed to break out of encirclement, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. Although its own casualties were considerable, the brigade succeeded in retaining its organisation and most of its automatic arms and other military equipment right up to the end of the retreat.

After the Aragon retreat the Dabrowskis spent over two months in the reserve of the newly formed Army of the Ebro, stationed in the village of Pradille and the surrounding area. The brigade's commander was a Soviet volunteer by the name of Mikhail Khvato (Kharchenko), and its commissar was L. Warela.

The period from May to July was extremely important for the subsequent history of the brigade. In accordance with directives from the Republican Government and Army Command, which took into account the bitter experience of the Aragon retreat, the brigade turned itself into a kind of large military school, the staffs were reorganised, and the officer and sergeant personnel strengthened by the promotion of many internationalists and Spaniards who had distinguished themselves in the recent fighting.

The military training, which was systematic and intensive, involved everyone without exception—officers, sergeants and men. As well as field exercises and manoeuvres, special courses in signals, reconnaissance, treatment of the sick, etc., were organised.

Three officer training schools were set up in the brigade, from which 540 troops graduated, and a school of surveillance and signalling with 55 pupils. Courses in specialised subjects were also organised in the battalions. Like the other units of the Army of the Ebro, the brigade was preparing itself for further fighting to liberate the territories captured by the enemy. Several times there were exercises in river-crossing.

It was at this time that the "activists' movement" began, led by the commissars. Troops undertook to master certain military subjects or weapons in a very short time and called on others to do the same. This movement involved more than 700 of the 2,400 troops and intensified the political and cultural life of the brigade. Meetings with the civilian population became more frequent. Workers' delegations and representatives of young people's and women's organisations often visited Pradille. In their turn the volunteers sent representatives to the Barcelona factories who acted as their patrons.

When the long-awaited Republican offensive eventually began on July 25, the volunteers, officers and men, were prepared for it, both militarily, politically and morally. The order to attack and cross the Ebro was greeted by the troops with real enthusiasm. The brigade took part in this operation as a unit of the 35th Division, which was commanded by Pedro Merino. It was in the advance units of the 15th Corps of the Ebro Army, which at 0.15 hours on July 25 began to force the river and advance along the main line of the Republican troops' attack. Acting together with the 11th International Brigade, the Dabrowskis crossed the river in small boats near the town of Ascó. Quickly overcoming the resistance of the enemy, who had been caught unawares, they succeeded in capturing the village of Venta de Campo, the small town of Corbera and other points of enemy resistance in less than twenty-four hours.

Approaching Gandesa, however, the units of the Republican Army came up against organised resistance from the enemy who had had time to summon reserves. Many days of heavy fighting followed, in which the 13th Brigade also took part. The first few days brought the brigade and the whole Army of the Ebro considerable success. The Dabrowskis advanced twenty kilometres into enemy territory, capturing about 2,000 men, 5 guns, 40 heavy machine-guns and many other weapons, 15 lorries, military depots, etc. Their losses were insignificant initially. During one week of fighting for Gandesa, however, i.e., by August 2, the brigade lost 220 dead and 429 wounded. Among those killed on the second day of the operation was the Communist Szymon Jaszuński, deputy commissar of the brigade, a scholar and well-known publicist.

The brigade's military qualities showed themselves even more clearly in the subsequent, defensive phase of the operation, when



the numerical and material superiority of Franco's troops, supported by Italian divisions and the German Condor Legion, became overwhelming.

In August and September 1938, the brigade, like the whole 35th Division, was engaged in extremely heavy fighting in the area of Gandesa and Corbera, on the Pandols and Caballs mountains. Throughout this period the fierce attacks of Franco's troops, who were trying to recapture lost territories and drive the Republican units back across the Ebro, were thwarted by the heroic Republican resistance. Every inch of ground was fought for. There were sometimes several attacks and counter-attacks during the day and key positions were constantly changing hands. Evidence of the special bravery and military success of the Dabrowskis was the award on August 7 of the Medal of Valour to the Mickiewicz Battalion, which was commanded by Franciszek Ksieżarczyk and had the Spanish Communist Robles as its commissar.

The first half of September was marked by particularly heavy fighting. On September 7 the enemy, supported by heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, repeatedly stormed the brigade's positions on the Caballs Mts sector. The Hungarian Battalion distinguished itself by recapturing Hills 362 and 368 in the space of a few hours by daring counter-attacks. The next day the enemy renewed its attacks and occupied Hill 356, but the Hungarians again drove the enemy back with the support of the Dabrowski Battalion.

On September 21 the enemy launched a general attack on the brigade's positions. The small Hill 281 held by the Mickiewicz Battalion became the target of heavy artillery fire and constant aerial bombardment. Franco's infantry launched a determined attack on the hill, but was forced to retreat with heavy losses. On the same day the Palafox Battalion, commanded by the Hungarian István Molnár and the commissar Eugeniusz Szyr, found itself in an exceptionally difficult position. It was cut off by the enemy who had managed to capture part of a position in the neighbouring sector. This difficult day was marked by many acts of bravery. The men of the Botwin and Shevchenko companies distinguished themselves in particular by their heroic defence of every inch of ground. They resisted to the last grenade when the enemy broke into their trenches. Nearly all of them died in hand-to-hand fighting with the foe.

For almost two months the brigade did not receive any reinforcements on the Ebro. By the latter half of September the battalion's numbers only slightly exceeded the official strength of a company, and the companies in their turn were a fraction larger than a platoon. The dead included Józef Kolorz (Kostecki), a member of the Polish community in France, Jurko Welykanowicz, a Ukrainian poet, Antoni Pietrzak, a company commander, Captain

Adam Lewiński, active in the youth movement of the Socialist Party, company commanders Jan Kirchner and Jan Gacek, Company Commissar Franciszek Mroziński and many others.

The brigade's military exploits were highly praised by the command. They were mentioned several times in the dispatches of the 35th Division and the 15th Corps; by governmental decree the brigade was awarded the highest military honour—the Medal of Valour.

The operation on the Ebro marked the end of the Polish volunteers' fighting in Spain. On September 23, during fierce fighting on the right bank of the Ebro, the Republican Government issued a decree on the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from Spain. With heavy hearts the Dabrowskis bade their Spanish comrades-in-arms farewell. At the parade of farewell, in which Dolores Ibarruri, Deputy Prime Minister of the Cortes, took part, the Polish volunteers swore a solemn oath that wherever they were they would always support the Spanish people and its just struggle.

After they had been recalled from the front, the Polish volunteers who had fought in the People's Army were put into repatriation camps in the vicinity of San Pedro de Torello. But weeks and months passed and still they were not able to leave Spain. The Polish Government, which had deprived the volunteers of Polish citizenship, would not even entertain the idea of their returning to Poland, and the governments of the West European countries refused to give them asylum. Up to the end of 1938 only France and, to a lesser extent, Belgium admitted small groups of Polish volunteers, mainly the sick and wounded. The rest were forced to await the results of the negotiations between the Republican authorities and the governments of other countries.

Thus the volunteers were subjected to a new moral ordeal, all the harsher because the events on the fronts were developing in a most unfavourable way for the Republic. Yet they did not lose heart. On their own initiative they helped the local peasants in the fields, repaired roads, etc. Doing the little they could to ease the food shortage among the civilian population, the volunteers constantly gave up part of their meagre army rations of bread, rice and milk for children and badly wounded refugees.

In the meantime the international situation was becoming increasingly tense. In September 1938 the Western powers signed the Munich agreement on the partition of Czechoslovakia. It was at this time that the volunteers at numerous meetings approved a Manifesto to the Polish People in which they expressed their profound concern at the mortal threat hanging over Poland, and their desire to return to their native land and take part in its defence.

These were tragic days for the Spanish people. The Catalan Front collapsed under the heavy blows of superior insurgent and



German-Italian interventionist forces, and columns of Franco's troops and Italian divisions marched into Barcelona and other Catalan towns. The position of the Republic was growing worse each day, that of Catalonia was hopeless.

On January 23, 1939, three days before the fascists entered the capital of Catalonia, a general meeting of volunteers in the village of Palafrugell agreed unanimously to re-join the Republican Army. This voluntary return to the front by people who had already been demobilised and were waiting to leave the country, at a time when the Republic was suffering heavy military defeats, was yet further confirmation of the volunteers' profound anti-fascism, their ardent internationalism and determination to remain true to the Spanish people's struggle up to the very end.

Shortly afterwards the volunteers received arms and advanced to meet the enemy. Together with the top Spanish units they managed to check the enemy's advance and provide cover for the evacuation of civilians who were leaving their homes and flocking to the French border.

The towns and villages of Granollers, Seva, Vich, Casa de la Selva, Gerona, and La Bisbal, the River Ter and, finally, the fortified border town of Figueras—these were the stages of the last march of the hastily re-created Dabrowski Brigade, under the command first of Henryk Toruńczyk and then of Mihály Szalvai. The last volunteers to perish on Spanish soil were those who lost their lives in the fighting by the border. They included Marian Kapitański, a well-known member of the Polish Communist Party from Czystochowa, who had been wounded three times earlier.

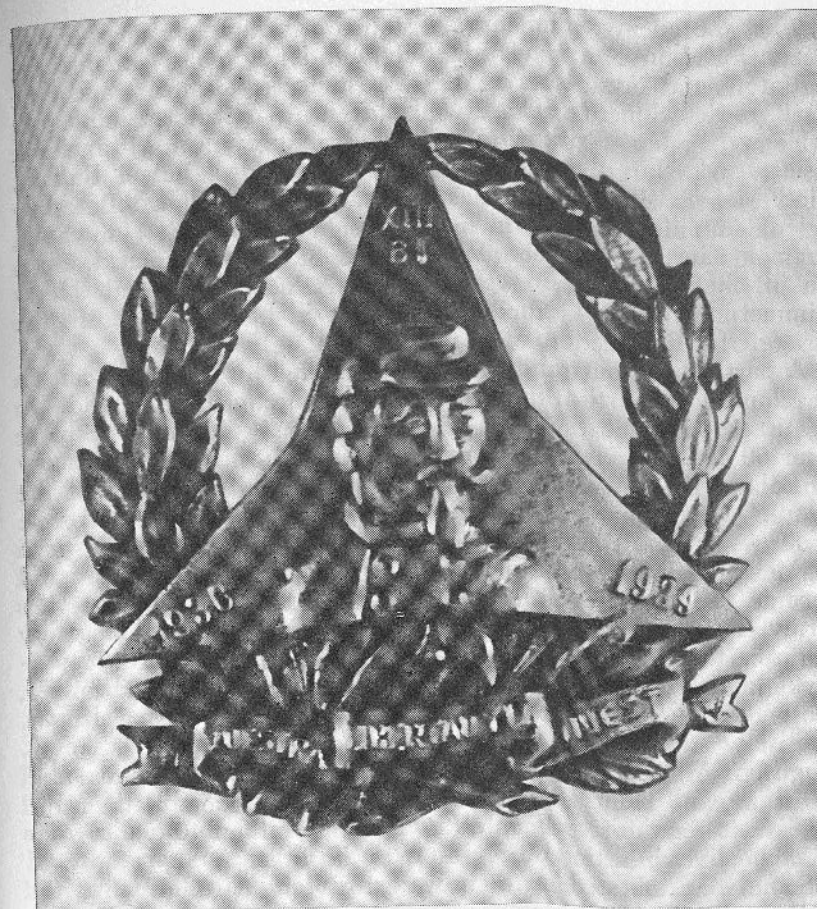
On February 9 the Polish volunteers crossed the French border in organised fashion in the ranks of the Republican detachments leaving Spain. There were about a thousand of them.

Another few hundred Poles, consisting mainly of the sick and wounded who had been evacuated earlier, were already in the USSR, France, Belgium and other countries.

As many as 3,200 Polish volunteers, sons of the working class, representatives of the peasantry and intelligentsia, found their last resting place on Spanish soil. They gave their lives in the struggle for the ideals of freedom and democracy—"for your freedom and ours".

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From February to August 1939, i.e., up to the outbreak of the Second World War, the majority of Polish volunteers were in French internee camps, living in very bad conditions and subject to all manner of victimisation by the camp authorities. These conditions were partially eased by the fine solidarity campaign of the French people, organised by French Communists and volunteers



The badge of the 13th (Dabrowski) Brigade

who were still at liberty. The Poles were deeply concerned about the fate of their native land, now faced with the direct threat of German invasion. In a message to the Polish President Ignacy Mościcki, in numerous public speeches, and in letters addressed to the Polish Embassy in Paris, they demanded the restoration of their Polish citizenship, and the right to return to their country and defend it against the obvious threat of German invasion. All their efforts were in vain, however,—the government turned a deaf ear to their appeals. In the period 1941 to 1945 in almost all the occupied countries—from Denmark to Yugoslavia—the volunteers, either singly or in small groups, joined the Communist and anti-fascist underground organisations waging a merciless struggle



against the enemy. The largest groups of volunteers operated in France, of course, and also in Belgium. They were among the initiators and organisers of the Resistance movement and the partisan detachments. Those who played a particularly important role were Jan Rutkowski, Grzegorz Korczyński, Franciszek Ksieżarczyk, Jan Leszkiewicz, Władysław Tylec, Paweł Balicki, Piotr Malec, Władysław Omastka, Franciszek Mogilany, Bolesław Jelén, Antoni Mrowiec, Henryk Sternhel (Gustaw), Jan Świt, Szymon Ciurlik and Leon Wachowiak. Stanisław Kubacki, Leon Pakin, Stanisław Toporowski, Feliks Zaluckowski and Hersz Zimmerman (Henryk) died in action or in fascist prisons in the struggle for the freedom of France and Poland.

A particularly outstanding role was played by the volunteers in developing the partisan movement in their occupied homeland. On the instructions of the Polish Workers' Party a group of more than 60 Dąbrowskis was dispatched from France and Germany to Poland in 1942. The instructor of the first detachment of the People's Guard, named after Ludwik Waryński, was Józef Mrozek. Dąbrowskis who commanded detachments and brigades, partisan regions and districts and held leading posts in the high command became the organisers of the People's Guard and the People's Army. They included Grzegorz Korczyński (later Poland's Deputy Minister for Defence), Franciszek Ksieżarczyk, Stefan Andryjańczyk, Jakub Aleksandrowicz, Antoni Grabowski, Józef Dąbrowski, Piotr Kartin (Andrzej Schmidt), Ludwik Katas, Ignacy Kubat, Stanisław Lange, J. Jasiński, J. Łoczyński, Wasyl Łazowy, Augustyn Michał, Jan Ślawinski, Józef Spiro, Henryk Sternhel (Gustaw), and Henryk Wóźniak. Unfortunately most of them did not live to see the free Poland: more than 40 Dąbrowskis lost their lives in action or in Gestapo prisons.

Some were arrested on their way to Poland, in Germany, and tortured in the death camps. They included S. Ulanowski, first commander of the Dąbrowski Battalion, and Józef Hruška. Dąbrowskis who were in the Soviet Union joined in the struggle against the Nazi invaders as early as 1941. About 100 of them were killed in action during 1941 and 1942, generally behind enemy lines, including the former commander of the 13th International Brigade, Józef Strzelczyk. This group included Ignacy Borkowski (Wicek), commander of a partisan brigade of the People's Army, Józef Ziółkowski, who took part in organising the Union of Polish Patriots on behalf of the Dąbrowskis and was one of the first political commissars of the Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division formed in the Soviet Union, and also a member of that division who took part in the Great October Socialist Revolution and the defence of Moscow in 1941, Stefan Konieczniak.

The Dąbrowskis played an active part in re-establishing the Polish Armed Forces on the territory of the Soviet Union. They

then traversed the long and glorious path of the Polish People's Army from Lenino to the Elbe. Among them were General Karol Świerczewski, organiser and commander of the 2nd Army of the Polish Armed Forces, later Deputy Minister of Defence in the Polish People's Republic, Henryk Toruńczyk, Eugeniusz Szyr, Mieczysław Szleyen, Józef Welker, Stanisław Broszko, Franciszek Górski, Stanisław Janik, Jan Perkowski, Jan Staszkowski, Platon Stroziuk, Józef Truszkowski, Antoni Dalecki, Wacław Kubiak and others. Isak Bajlowicz, Władysław Donajski, Hersz Rapaport and Michał Robak lost their lives fighting for the freedom of Poland in the ranks of the Polish Army.

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The participation of Polish volunteers in the national-revolutionary war of the Spanish people is a splendid page in the progressive traditions of the Polish people and the international contribution of the Polish working class to the anti-fascist Resistance. The selfless struggle of the Polish troops in the International Brigades helped broad circles of the Polish democratic public to understand the Spanish war and the criminal character of German fascism—the enemy of freedom and independence.

For the Polish volunteers the struggle against fascism begun on the fronts of Spain in 1936-39, continued in the years of the war for the national liberation of their homeland from the German invaders and ended with the joint victory over the Nazi Reich by the peoples of the anti-Hitler coalition.

In devoting their strength to building People's Poland which is advancing along the socialist path, the internationalist veterans, like the whole Polish people, are inspired by feelings of patriotism and international solidarity with fraternal peoples. Their hearts and constant assistance are with their Spanish brothers who have not ceased the struggle for the freedom of their native land.



## RUMANIA

The heroic struggle of the Spanish people in 1936-39 for national independence, democracy and progress found widespread support in Rumania. The working class, the progressive intelligentsia and all the country's democratic forces expressed their sympathy with Republican Spain and their solidarity with its heroic defenders.

Operating in extremely difficult conditions as an underground movement, the Rumanian Communist Party was the motive force and organiser of the solidarity movement. From the very beginning of the war the Party voiced its protest against the military fascist revolt, the armed intervention of Hitler and Mussolini and the "non-intervention" policy of the British, French and United States governments. Under its guidance democratic forces in Rumania made their contribution to the international movement of solidarity with the Spanish people's struggle. The Party stressed the great danger which fascism represented to the Spanish people and the peoples of the whole world. In documents prepared by the Central Committee, in the illegal Party press and the legal democratic press, in pamphlets and appeals to the masses, the Party revealed the significance of the fighting in Spain and the just, national-revolutionary nature of the war which the Spanish people were waging in defence of the Republic.

The fifth extended plenary meeting of the Party's Central Committee held in August 1936 sent a message of greeting to the Spanish Communist Party, the true leader of the Spanish people in its struggle for freedom and democracy. At the same time the Party addressed an appeal to the Rumanian people calling on the working population to support the Spanish people and its lawful government. One of the pamphlets said that the struggle in Spain "coincides with the Rumanian people's struggle for the right to work, bread, land, peace and freedom...". "Workers, peasants,

Proletari din toate țările, uniți-vă!

# Lupta de Clasă

ORGANUL TEORETIC AL COMITETULUI CENTRAL AL PARTIDULUI COMUNIST  
DIN ROMÂNIA  
(Secțiune a Internaționalei Comuniste)

Anul XVII No. 1 Pref. Lei 10 August—Septembrie 1936

## EVENIMENTELE DIN SPANIA ȘI SARCINILE PROLETARIATULUI DIN ROMÂNIA

I.

Victoria Frontului Popular din alegerile din 16 Februarie a c. a. doborât guvernul reacționar în Spania. S'a creat guvernul Frontului Popular care a dat amnistie generală pentru toți antifasciștii și luptătorii contra restabilirii dictaturii în 1934; improprietățile Partidului a țărănilor a obligat pe marii capitaliști să plătească sumele scăzute din salariile muncitorilor în timpul dictaturii; a introdus săptămâna de 40 de ore; a legiferat asigurările sociale, ajutorul pentru șomeri, asigurarea libertății de organizare, presă, grevă, demonstrații, pentru muncitori și țărani; a oprit amestecul armatei și poliției în conflictele dintre muncitori și patroni, între țărani și moșieri; a recunoscut autonomia Cataluniei. Toate aceste măsuri luate de guvernul cșit din alegerile din Februarie, de sigur au îmbunătățit și promiteau îmbunătățirea și mai mult a situației maselor muncitoare și țărănești din întreaga Spanie.

The article "Events in Spain and the Tasks of the Rumanian Proletariat" published in *Lupta de Clasă*, the theoretical organ of the Central Committee of the Rumanian Communist Party

citizens!" wrote the Rumanian Communists. "Hold rallies, organise meetings and demonstrations of protest against the help which German, Italian and Portuguese fascism is giving to the Spanish counter-revolution! Pass resolutions of support, send telegrams of solidarity to the heroic Spanish people who, by fighting for their life and liberty, are defending peace the whole world over."<sup>1</sup>

On September 1, 1936, *Scinteia* (The Spark), the central organ of the Rumanian Communist Party, pointed to the need to set up joint committees of workers and democratic social organisations in Rumania to give assistance to the Spanish people.

The same month the theoretical organ of the Party's Central Committee, a journal entitled *Lupta de Clasă* (The Class Struggle), in an article entitled "Events in Spain and the Tasks of the Rumanian Proletariat" appealed to the Rumanian public to direct all its efforts "to the struggle against the threat of war and fascism, to the defence of the Spanish people!" The Party pointed

<sup>1</sup> *Voluntari romani in Spania*, Bucharest, 1971, pp. 50-51.



out the community of interests between Spanish, German and Italian fascists and reactionary circles in Rumania. A brochure entitled *The Fate of Peace and Freedom Is Being Decided in Spain* said: "We, politically conscious workers, we, honest democrats, have realised that the fate of the independence of weaker countries threatened with fascist occupation is being decided in Spain. In Spain, too, the independence of Rumania, the freedom of its citizens, and the lives of its children are also at stake."

The Rumanian working class was at the forefront of the solidarity movement with the Spanish Republic. The delegates at the Congress of the General Union of Railway Trade Unions, held in the summer of 1936, sent warm greetings to the fighters of Spain on behalf of the railway workers. Shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish war the Communists organised numerous events in support of the Spanish Republic, including a large demonstration outside the Spanish Embassy. On May 1, 1937, in Bucharest, Cluj, Jassy, Braila, Târgul-Mures, Timisoara, Tulcea, Braşov and other towns anti-fascist rallies and meetings of solidarity with the Spanish people were held. Not only workers took part in this movement, but all progressive intellectuals, craftsmen, peasants, students, young people, and members of the democratically-inclined bourgeoisie.

Among the many Rumanian intellectuals who expressed their sympathy with Republican Spain's noble struggle were the politician Dr Petru Groza, the active members of the working-class movement M. Gh. Bujor and P. Constantinescu-Iaşi, the journalists and publicists Al. Sahia, Al. C. Constantinescu, Jeo Bogza, Scarlat Callimachi, Zaharia Stancu, Ilie Cristea, Demostene Botez, and Ioşsa Bela, the eminent scholars C. I. Parhon, Nicolae Jorga, Gh. Marinescu, Traian Săvulescu, the composer George Enescu, the conductor George Georgescu, the actor and producer Tony Bulandra, the authors Mihail Sadoveanu, George Călinescu, Victor Eftimiu, N. D. Cocea, Ion Călugăru and Eugen Jebeleanu.

In the face of the growing nazi danger, which threatened the very existence of Rumania as a state, a number of eminent bourgeois political leaders, for example, Dr Nicolae Lupu, Grigore Iunian, Dem. Dobrescu, Grigore Filipescu and others, supported the Spanish Republic.

The Rumanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, dismissed from the government in August 1936, was a far-seeing politician and advocate of collective security in Europe. He spoke out in favour of assisting the lawful Spanish Government and played an active part in the Rumanian Peace Committee as its Honorary President.

At international anti-fascist congresses the representatives of this committee, which was run by Nicolae Lupu, and of other anti-fascist committees and mass organisations joined their votes to

those of the delegates of other peoples in support of the anti-fascist struggle of the Spanish people.

The anti-Hitler stance of a section of the Rumanian bourgeoisie explains to a certain extent the sale of oil to the Spanish Government at the beginning of the war. In the latter half of 1936 and the early months of 1937, the Spanish tankers *Compero* and *Remedios* and others left Constanta loaded with oil products. The growth of fascist elements in the Rumanian monarchical government put an end to these trade operations. But subsequently, on the initiative of the Rumanian Communist Party, committees of aid to Republican Spain were set up throughout the country. Right at the beginning of the war a Joint Committee was set up in Bucharest to co-ordinate aid to Spain. It was composed of representatives of the Communist, Socialist and Independent Socialist parties, the Democratic Students' Front, anti-fascist defence committees, the Independent Socialist Youth Union, the General Association of Private Employees and various trade-union and other public organisations.

The Aid Spain committees operated illegally and were subject to persecution and repression by the authorities and also to attacks by fascist elements. In spite of these difficult conditions, the committees disseminated brochures, newspapers and pamphlets telling the truth about the Spanish people's struggle, and collected funds, food, clothing and medicaments. The trade unions, IRA and other organisations played an active part in this work. In October 1936, the first ambulance purchased with funds raised by the Aid Spain committees was sent to Spain.

The public and the authorities of the Spanish Republic frequently expressed their gratitude to the Rumanian people for the help to their country. Thus, a letter of November 30, 1937 from Catalonia to the editors of the Bucharest newspaper *Zorile* (Dawn) conveyed warm thanks for supporting the struggle of the Spanish people.

The Communist Party was the initiator and organiser of sending volunteers to the Spanish Republic. Its appeal was answered by anti-fascists—workers, peasants, students and intellectuals. The participation of about 500 Rumanian volunteers in the armed struggle side by side with Spanish troops and volunteers from many other countries became the noblest expression of the Rumanian people's solidarity with the people of Spain.

Continuing the finest revolutionary traditions of their people, the Rumanian volunteers contributed new and glorious pages to the history of its struggle for freedom. On March 15, 1937, in an address to the Rumanian people, they wrote: "Our struggle here, in Spain, is none other than the struggle of the Rumanian people for peace and freedom. We are proud that, side by side with the Spanish people, we can bear aloft the banner of our ancestors



Avram Iancu, Horia, Cloșca, Crișan, Tudor Vladimirescu and all those who perished in the struggle against social oppression for the free development of all the peoples of the world." The Rumanian patriots' profound love of their country was organically linked with an awareness of their internationalist duty, which can be seen from the words on their banner: "For your freedom and ours". The envoys of the Rumanian people fought valiantly on all the fronts of the Spanish Republic, showing the deep devotion of Rumanian anti-fascists to the cause of the Spanish people's freedom.

In the International Brigades of the Republican Army separate units were formed consisting predominantly of Rumanians. These units were named after famous politicians and heroic events in the Rumanian people's struggle for freedom. In the 11th International Brigade an artillery battalion was set up named after Anna Pauker (with which the Tudor Vladimirescu Battery was subsequently merged); in Estremadura an artillery group named after Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in the Slav Artillery Battalion; in Aragon and Levante a machine-gun company and the Grivița rifle company in the Djaković Battalion of the 129th International Brigade; and on the Ebro a company of the separate Divisionario Battalion of the 45th Division.

The Anna Pauker Battalion, formed from two batteries of field artillery in Murcia in January 1937, included Rumanians and volunteers from other countries alongside the French and Belgians. A firm friendship grew up between the troops of the various nationalities. The Rumanian volunteer Valter Roman was appointed battalion commander.

The battalion received its baptism of fire at the beginning of the battle of the Jarama in the closing of the fascist breach. The battalion's heavy bombardment supported the 11th International Brigade, which was having difficulty in containing the enemy onslaught. The gun barrels became too hot to touch from constant firing.

The enemy then went over to the attack towards the villages of Morata de Tajuña and Arganda. On the initiative of the battalion command the brigade commander decided, contrary to the traditional tactics, to open massed artillery fire on the fascist positions and concentrations at night. The fascists were caught unawares. Prisoners captured on the following day admitted that the artillery bombardment of the previous night had thrown the fascist command into confusion and caused heavy losses in men and equipment.

The same day the battalion's artillery put out of action five of the sixteen fascist tanks attacking the sector of the front occupied by the 11th International Brigade. This enabled the latter to launch a counter-attack and regain its lost positions.

For exemplary execution of its combat assignment the commander of the 11th International Brigade, Colonel Hans Kahle, thanked the battalion in an order of the day which read: "The Anna Pauker Artillery Battalion composed of French and Franco-Belgian batteries, fought in an exemplary manner during these days and earned the highest praise. It completely destroyed an enemy battery and its ammunition depot. Moreover it bombarded enemy trenches, inflicting considerable losses on Moroccan units, neutralised a number of machine-gun nests and flame-throwers, destroyed five enemy tanks with direct hits, and repulsed a violent enemy attack yesterday evening with heavy artillery fire..."<sup>1</sup>

March 1937 was a month of great victory for the Republicans at Guadalajara. After some gruelling days and nights of stubborn bloody defence the Republican troops went over to a counter-attack and routed the Italian fascist divisions. In this counter-attack the artillery battalion supported the operations of the Spanish units and battalions of the 11th International Brigade. After heavy bombardment by Republican aircraft and artillery fire, the Republican troops supported by tanks broke through the Italian defence line.

The battalion was ordered to help the Paris Commune Battalion attack the fascists' fortified centre of resistance in the stone buildings of the Casa del Cobo.

The battalion's firing was directed from the bell-tower of the small town of Trijueque which had just been captured from the enemy. Realising this, the enemy opened fire on the tower, but the artillery officers did not abandon their observation post. The Republican troops went over to the offensive and the panic-stricken fascists rushed out of the Casa del Cobo. The Paris Commune Battalion cut off the Italian fascists' line of retreat with a bayonet assault and captured many prisoners.

After the Guadalajara operation the Anna Pauker Battalion was reinforced with captured Italian guns and ammunition and some Italian armoured cars. As part of the 35th International Division the artillery battalion was shortly to take part in the first large Republican offensive on Brunete, in particular, the heavy fighting that preceded the capture of the village of Quijorna and the resistance to enemy counter-attacks on Brunete.

In the course of the battle of Brunete the Rumanian Valter Roman was appointed artillery officer of the 35th Division which included the 11th International Brigade.

Particularly memorable are the successful operations of a group of artillerymen during the 35th Division's offensive on the Aragon Front near Zaragoza. In their attack on the strongly fortified village of Quinto the Republican infantry was having trouble in capturing an important point of enemy resistance—a cemetery.

<sup>1</sup> *Pasaremos*, March 2, 1937, p. 4.



A group of artillerymen with a truck-drawn cannon got to within 400-500 metres of the enemy positions and began firing point-blank on the fascist trenches. Caught unawares, the enemy turned tail and fled. To quote General Walter (Karol Swierczewski), commander of the 35th International Division, "this cannon not only helped our infantry to capture the enemy positions, but—even more important—convinced the Spanish gunners who were watching of the possibility and advantages of point-blank artillery firing".<sup>1</sup> This military experience was put to good use by the Republicans in the subsequent fighting for Quinto and Belchite.

The capture of Quinto brought with it a great deal of equipment including guns. Ten of them were repaired. In this way the artillery battalion replenished its equipment. In the harsh winter of 1937/38 the Rumanian artillery took part in the second phase of the Teruel operation. The Republican units took by storm the town of Teruel. The enemy gathered its superior forces, however, and launched a counter-attack. The 35th Division was transferred to the most threatened sector. The 11th and 15th brigades and the artillery battalion engaged in heavy defensive fighting with the fascists. One of the batteries, which was supporting positions on the Muleton Hill, became cut off. With great difficulty the artillerymen managed to break out. As a result of this fighting all the battalion's guns were destroyed.

After receiving new guns, the Rumanian artillery took part in the large offensive on the Ebro. The Tudor Vladimirescu Battery crossed the river under heavy aerial bombardment and immediately attacked the enemy. Right up to September 23, 1938—when the international volunteers were recalled from the front—each artilleryman did his duty honourably.

Another group of Rumanian artillerymen operated on the Estremadura Front as part of a Slav heavy artillery battalion. The battery was covering a large sector of the front. It frequently had to change its firing positions. The Rumanian volunteers showed initiative and ingenuity. They improvised a device for rapid loading and unloading of the guns on lorries and found a way of making the gun wheels steadier. This made it four times as quick for the battery to change position and move the guns from one sector to another. As a result the battalion was able to confuse the fascist command as to the real strength of the Republican artillery on this sector of the front.

The self-sacrifice and initiative of the Rumanian artillerymen was frequently mentioned in command orders to the battalion.

The names shall never be forgotten of the heroic gunners Nicolae Cristea, a metalworker from Galati and former secretary

<sup>1</sup> Karol Swierczewski (Walter), *W bojach o wolność Hiszpanii*, Warsaw, 1966, pp. 86, 230.



Volunteers of the Tudor Vladimirescu Battery

of the Bucharest Party Committee, who commanded the Tudor Vladimirescu Battery in Spain and died a hero's death in the French Resistance; Nicolae Pop, a worker and Communist from Sibiu, one of the first Rumanian volunteers in Spain, who gave his life for his people's cause in the Second World War; Andrei Sas Dragoș, the engineer Iancu Zilberman, and Alexandru Lazăr, who lost their lives in the French Resistance; and Matias Ludovic, killed in action in the Second World War. The following were among those who fought in the battle of the Ebro: Mihail Florescu, Grigore Gheza Vida (now a people's artist of the Socialist Republic of Rumania), Nikolae Moraru, Vasile Călugăru, Andrei Roman (commissar of the Tudor Vladimirescu Battery), Ion Sachelarie, Vasile Costiniuc, Mihai Bojku, Traian Bujor, and Gheorghe Adorian. Side by side with the Rumanian volunteers fought the sons of other peoples, including such fine soldiers and unforgettable comrades as the French battery commanders, Gaston Carré and Samuel Arbousset; Paul Richard, battalion commander and hero of the French Resistance; the Spaniards Ricardo Camarillo and Angel Marotto, the Italian Giuseppe Calisuri, the Czech Zdenek Pribyl and many others.

Rumanian volunteers also served in infantry units. Everywhere they fought bravely and selflessly. One of the first Rumanian volunteers, Mihai Ardeleanu, son of a Transylvanian peasant, died a hero's death in the defence of Madrid.

After bitter fighting on one of the sectors of the Madrid Front the enemy managed to break through Republican positions. It was



necessary to inform command of this immediately, but the road was under enemy bombardment. Mihai Ardeleanu volunteered to deliver the dispatch. He leapt on a horse and galloped off, watched anxiously by his comrades who remained at their positions. He reached his goal safely, but was caught by a round of machine-gun fire on the way back. Hanging on to his horse's neck he managed to get back to the trenches, but when his comrades rushed to meet him there was nothing more they could do for him.

In the south of Spain, in Andalucía, a group of Rumanian railway workers had their first taste of fighting in the 9th Battalion of the 14th International Brigade around Montoro.

Formed in December 1936, the 9th Battalion arrived at the Andalucian Front before the other units and received orders to check the advance of the enemy who had broken through the front and was advancing without encountering any resistance. Before they had time to deploy for combat and take up positions, the battalion's companies suddenly came under heavy enemy cross fire from the surrounding hills. Shortly afterwards enemy aircraft appeared, which bombed and strafed the volunteers. Lacking military training and in their first operation on the front, the volunteers panicked. At this critical point a young Rumanian Communist and railway worker by the name of Constantin Burcă, an M.G. platoon commander, set up a machine-gun and opened fire on the fascists. The most difficult moment had been overcome. The machine-gunners and several infantry platoons managed to hold back the enemy until nightfall, enabling the rest of the battalion to retreat. Constantin Burcă died a hero's death. The volunteer Leontin Dorohoi from Moldavia was killed in this fighting, while covering the battalion's retreat over the Guadalquivir. With the arrival of the other battalions, the 14th Brigade carried out its mission and the fascist advance was checked.

In the three weeks of fighting on the Jarama, the constant attacks and counter-attacks frequently turned into bayonet assaults. The following two Rumanian infantrymen distinguished themselves here: a worker by the name of Mihai Cristov, who fought in the Georgy Dimitrov Battalion, and Emil Șneiberg, a Communist student from Jassy, who died a hero's death fighting in the French Battalion. When all the officers were out of action he took command of the unit until he was struck down by an enemy bullet. French anti-fascists remember his name with respect to this very day.

In the Brunete operation Rumanian volunteers fought in the Balkan Djaković Battalion and other military units. George Ciul was killed on this front, and Constantin Cîmpeanu wounded, to mention but a couple.

By the end of summer 1937 the first infantry unit consisting mainly of Rumanians had been set up—a machine-gun company

of the Djaković Battalion. The company commander was Mihai Burcă.

The company was formed in Samper de Calanda, in Aragon, where a large group of new Rumanian volunteers had arrived. It was a truly international one, including Rumanians, Yugoslavs, Spaniards, Bulgarians and Greeks. It received its baptism of fire in autumn 1937 in the fighting on the Fuentes de Ebro sector near Zaragoza. Machine-gunner Anghel Haralambie was wounded, but did not leave his post. Command made mention of the company for its fortitude and bravery. In November the 45th Division was sent to Estremadura. Here a new international brigade was formed—the 129th. It included the Slav and Balkan Dimitrov, Masaryk and Djaković battalions. The latter was commanded by the Yugoslav Baumann and his deputy at one time was the Rumanian Petre Borilă who was subsequently seriously wounded. In autumn 1937 Mihai Burcă took command of the battalion after Baumann. The arrival of yet another group of Rumanians and the formation of an infantry company bearing the illustrious name of Grivita<sup>1</sup> was a great event for the Rumanian volunteers. A short respite in Chillon was used by the Djaković Battalion and other units of the 129th Brigade for military training, political instruction and strengthening friendly relations with the local population.

The hour of greatest tribulation for the Rumanian units of the 129th International Brigade came in the spring of 1938 on the Aragon and Levante fronts. The Republican Army on the Aragon Front was shuddering under the blows of superior enemy forces. The fascist troops were approaching the Mediterranean, threatening to divide Republican territory into two. Enemy motorised units were cutting off and encircling Republican formations in lightning assaults. It was becoming increasingly difficult to determine the new lines of resistance. Republican reserve brigades marched into battle under the constant risk of being encircled. Yet the Spanish troops and the men of the International Brigades showed heroic determination in these difficult conditions.

The 129th Brigade took part in the bitter fighting against the fascists on the Monroyo-Morella-Poblete sector and suffered heavy casualties.

The Djaković Battalion was ordered to cover the retreat of the neighbouring division. On the sector of the front where the Rumanian units were positioned only three lorries managed to get through to the lines laid down in the order. The rest encountered heavy enemy firing and were forced to seek for a bypass route. The men in the first three lorries took up positions and held them, in spite of strong enemy pressure, until the other battalion companies

<sup>1</sup> Grivita was the centre of the revolutionary struggle of Rumanian workers in February 1933.



arrived. A little later the enemy encircled this group almost entirely. Platoon Commander García was killed by a bullet, and several men were badly wounded. Communication with the battalion command was broken. Stefan Megheri, a member of the Central Committee of the Union of Rumanian Communist Youth, was sent with a dispatch to the battalion command post. He managed to crawl through the sector under enemy fire and to get back to the front with an order from the battalion command.

In Monroyo the Grivita Company's position was heavily bombarded by enemy artillery for 45 minutes, after which hundreds of bombs were dropped on it in a series of air raids. Assuming that it would not meet with any resistance, the fascist infantry went into attack. The volunteers let the fascists get close, then opened fire on a signal from their commander and the enemy was driven back.

Stefan Megheri was killed, fighting the enemy to his last breath. The commander of the Grivita Company, Horia Moldoveanu, was badly wounded in the fighting on this sector.

At Poblete the fascists again sent a hail of shells and bombs on the Republican positions. All that remained of the platoon commanded by the Rumanian volunteer Nicolae Roșu, a Bucharest metalworker, was one section with a single machine-gun. With the help of this machine-gun Roșu withstood constant fascist infantry attacks, alternating with artillery bombardment of the trenches occupied by Nicolae's section. The brave machine-gunner fought on until he was killed by a shell.

When the troops of the insurgents and interventionists divided Republican territory in two on April 15, 1938, the only international brigade in the south, in the Levante, was the 129th. In its ranks Rumanian volunteers defended the Levante Province and the approaches to Valencia, an important strategic point for the Republic.

In driving back the fascist attacks, the 129th Brigade frequently went over to counter-attack. One of these is engraved forever in the memories of those who took part in it. The Italian troops and Falangists were caught unawares. After two hours of heavy fighting the Republican infantry broke through the enemy positions, occupied a commanding height and, tearing down the Franco flag, hoisted the banner of the Spanish Republic. Many fascists were taken prisoner. Sergeant Constantin Bodeanu and Private Cocimarovschi lost their lives, storming the fascist fortifications. Here too, on the Levante Front, the Rumanian volunteers Aurel Stancu and Minea Stan were badly wounded.

In the spring of 1938 Rumanian infantrymen formed the nucleus of one of the companies of a battalion of the 45th Division. The company's political commissar was Gheorghe Stoica,

a veteran of the Rumanian working-class movement. The company took part in defensive fighting on the right bank of the Ebro. It was here that the young volunteer Constantin Iacob, son of a Bacău peasant, lost his life.

The last big offensive of the Republican Army was the battle of the Ebro which began on July 25 in the hot summer of 1938. Republican troops consisting of two army corps crossed the Ebro and rolled the fascists back thirty kilometres. Going over to the defensive, the Republicans repulsed the counter-attacks of the insurgents and interventionists. The fascists concentrated large contingents of troops, ground equipment and aircraft on this sector of the front. Each of the sides was out to gain control of the commanding heights in the Pandols and Caballs mountains. It lasted about three months, during which positions changed hands several times. We shall describe one episode only. The fascists had succeeded in capturing a tactically important hill in the Caballs mountains. It had to be recaptured at all costs. This task was entrusted to a battalion of the 45th Division. The fascists guessed what the Republicans were about to do and raised a barrage of fire from all the guns along the valley which the Republicans had to cross. Nevertheless, by making skilful use of the local relief the battalion advanced on the enemy trenches and captured the hill. The following Rumanians took part in the fighting for the



A group of Rumanian volunteers



Caballs mountains: Constantin Doncea, former chairman of a railway workers' strike committee in the Grivita shops in Bucharest in February 1933; Alexandru Constantinescu, Marin Selea, the three Minor brothers and M. Faltin. Alexandru Făclie, a young student from Craiova and a member of the Democratic Front of Rumanian Students, was killed in this fighting.

The nineteenth of September, 1938 is memorable as one of the last engagements on the Ebro in which Rumanian volunteers took part. Early in the morning fascist aircraft bombed the battalion's positions and after many hours of artillery bombardment, when it seemed that nothing could remain alive in the battalion's trenches, the enemy infantry launched their attack. It encountered fierce resistance, however. All day the Republicans drove back the enemy attacks. By evening the fascists had managed to capture a few trenches, and they attempted to penetrate into the rear and encircle the battalion. By that time there remained only two Rumanian volunteers—Miron Lazăr and Alexandru Brix—who could still go on fighting. They tried to beat off the enemy with small arms and hand grenades. The worker Alexandru Brix died a hero's death fighting to the last breath.

The Rumanian volunteers Ion Călin, Francisc Bocor, Alexandru Mihail and many others who distinguished themselves by their valour in the battle of the Ebro died heroically later in the French Resistance and on other fronts of the anti-fascist struggle.

Rumanian volunteers also fought on the Ebro in other International Brigades. They included Constantin Paliga, who was killed in the fighting on the right bank of the Ebro.

\* \* \*

A group of Rumanian medical workers consisting of more than twenty doctors and nurses worked in Spain. These volunteers were spread all over Republican Spain: the nurses worked in hospitals in the rear, and the doctors Stefan Sinculescu, David Iancu, Bucur Cleja, Arcu, Hermina Tismăneanu and others primarily in the medical units of the brigades.

The Rumanian doctors, like their colleagues of other nationalities, shared the joys and sorrows, burdens and dangers of the troops. Some of them were wounded and two killed.

Doctor Andrei Tilea was the first Rumanian doctor to come to Spain. He took part in the fighting at Irun. After the town was captured by the fascists a large number of its defenders retreated into France, then returned to Spain and joined the Republican Army. The others, consisting mainly of Asturian miners, stayed in the north of Spain and continued the struggle in guerrilla detachments. Andrei Tilea went off with the guerrillas into the hills and took part in the fighting until he was captured by the fascists. He

bravely withstood all torture. The fascists killed this intrepid Communist without succeeding in breaking him.

The Rumanian doctor Felix Ippen died a hero's death at his post in the Brunete operation.

In the autumn of 1938, in accordance with a decision of the Spanish Republican Government the volunteers of the International Brigades were recalled from the front and billeted in various Catalan towns and villages before being sent home. The international volunteers who had fought on the fronts of Central Spain were transported to Catalonia by sea, where a moving meeting of all the Rumanian brigaders took place. They could not go home because the reactionary Rumanian Government had forbidden them to enter the country.

In January 1939 the Rumanian volunteers together with all the others again took up arms. In prolonged defensive fighting together with Spanish units they made it possible for hundreds of thousands of peaceful civilians fleeing from fascist bondage to cross the French frontier.

During the Second World War Rumanian volunteers in the French Resistance and in guerrilla detachments operating in Rumania, the USSR, Czechoslovakia and other countries, and also in Rumanian units during the anti-fascist war fought bravely and selflessly against the fascist invaders and added new heroic pages to the history of international solidarity and the struggle of the Rumanian people for the freedom of their native land.

Today the Communist Party of Rumania and the whole Rumanian people support the heroic and fearless struggle of the Spanish people and its Communist Party for democracy, social progress, and an independent and free Spain.



## SWEDEN

In the thirties, Sweden, like other capitalist countries, was hit by a wave of unemployment in the wake of the world economic crisis. A high tide of strike struggles swept the length and breadth of Sweden. Pulp-and-paper industry enterprises, building sites and the merchant marine were a scene of bitter struggle for the working people's rights. Scabs acted under police protection, but this was not enough for the Swedish bourgeois liberal government, so troops were called in.

In May 1931, a military patrol opened fire on workers in Odalen, killing five. Violent protest demonstrations swept the country. Police used truncheons and swords, many demonstrators were arrested and jailed. Under pressure from public opinion, however, the government had to pull out the troops. While in one place the strike movement was at an ebb, in another it flared up with renewed vigour. The struggle was the most relentless where employers refused to negotiate with the workers and cut down wages.

The bankruptcy of the Kreiger concern exposed the bleeding ulcers of the economic system of free enterprise and led to a political crisis which exposed the involvement of the top leadership of the ruling bourgeois parties, including the head of state, in the profiteering of monopoly capital.

The political situation in the country was unstable. Rival movements of free-thinkers and liberals emerged within the "bourgeois Left" party as far back as the early thirties. Groups of pro-fascist orientation broke away from the Right parties. The Left wing of the working-class movement was weakened by numerous splits which had been in evidence since the twenties. The victory of the Social-Democratic Party at the election to the Riksdag (parliament) in 1932 and the establishment of a Social-Democratic government put an end to the domination of the country's political life by the bourgeois parties.

These political processes occurred in an atmosphere of anxiety and apprehensions which prevailed in Sweden and other Scandi-

navian countries as the muddy waves of nazism flooded Central Europe.

Within the reformist wing of the working-class movement quite a few sombre forecasts were made about the inevitable defeat of the working-class movement and imminent long decades of a bloody reign of terror. The world was threatened by a mortal danger. Rumours of monstrous atrocities in the German concentration camps leaked through the smoke of the Reichstag fire in Berlin. The Western powers were retreating before nazism and pursued the disastrous policy of appeasement, while the world's only socialist state, the USSR, was surrounded by enemies.

That is why the victories of the Left in the parliamentary elections in France and Spain sparked hope in every honest Socialist and democrat. On the other hand, the establishment of the Popular Front in these countries aroused apprehensions and caused a hostile reaction not only among the rightists but also within the Swedish liberal bourgeoisie. This may seem strange since the leading role in the election bloc of the Popular Front parties in Spain and in the Republican Government was played by the Left-wing bourgeois Republicans. It will be recalled, however, that for the Swedish bourgeoisie of every shade socialism was something like the devil in the flesh, while fascism was a socially kindred phenomenon and perfectly tolerable, particularly in its Italian variant, although some of Mussolini's actions, for example, the invasion of Abyssinia, produced of course an unpleasant impression, while the brutality of the German nazis repelled the liberal circles to a certain extent. But to make up for it, those of the Right-wing bourgeois camp were beside themselves with glee and justified any means to suppress the German working-class movement, regarding nazi concentration camps as a perfectly rational way to deal with it.

These basic points of view were thrown into salient relief by the appearance of Franco and his lieutenants on the political scene. The bourgeois press with few exceptions published Franco versions of current developments. Information was sifted: provocations and murders perpetrated by reactionaries and the Falange were as a rule hushed down, while the defensive counter-measures taken by Republican anti-fascists were presented under a "Red terror" rubric. "Swedish Engineer Describes Terror in Barcelona", "Terror in Valencia" were typical headings in the two biggest liberal newspapers. The *Svenska Dagbladet* yearbook (1936-1939), claiming a business-like and accurate presentation of facts, published the following comment of the release of 35,000 political prisoners after the victory of the Popular Front at the election to the Cortes in 1936: "The numerous gang of murderers—organisers of the rebellion in Asturias—have returned in triumph to where they committed their crimes."



The same yearbook published the following description of the situation in Spain in the spring of 1936: "The Reds have burned down churches and monasteries, robbed banks and attacked those holding other political views than their own. In mid-March, the whole of Spain was a boiling witch cauldron. Massacres were in progress in many localities. All of Granada where the Reds were in control was governed by martial law. In the Badajoz province, thousands of farm labourers forcibly seized private property...."

The editorial offices of bourgeois newspapers did not confine themselves to tendentious selection and presentation of information, but they also published deliberate lies supporting Franco and damaging the Republican cause. Since bourgeois papers accounted for about 85 per cent of the entire press circulation it is easy to imagine how distorted was the idea of Spanish events a large share of the people had at the time.

Lies of the bourgeois press, its open hostility to Spanish democracy, its active support of the treacherous mutiny against a lawful government elected by the people on the part of preachers of "loyalty to the homeland, the officer's honour and the military oath" naturally aroused protests from the democratic forces, above all, from the organised working class.

The worker press, handicapped as it was by a shortage of funds, consistently supported the Spanish Republic. News items and articles it published gave the Swedish people the true picture of Spanish events and laid bare the lies of the bourgeois press.

In February 1936, the worker press carried this report: "A landslide victory for the Left in Spain. The absolute majority of the people supports the Popular Front." Printing daily reports on street clashes with Falange thugs, on plans of the Spanish military to declare a state of siege, *Ny Dag*, the central organ of the Communist Party, nevertheless made this optimistic conclusion: "Anti-fascist winds are sweeping the world".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the Swedish anti-fascists launched a campaign for aid to victims of reaction: a group of Swedish seamen arrested in Nazi Germany, the famous leader of the Finnish workers, Antikainen, put on trial in Helsinki, Ernst Thaelmann languishing in a Nazi dungeon. It was decided to boycott the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin in protest against the Nazi atrocities. Most trade unions forbade their members to attend it, and many leading athletes decided to go to the People's Olympiad to be held in Barcelona July 22-26.

The fascist revolt in Spain contributed to the consolidation of different groups within the Swedish anti-fascist solidarity movement. The mass meeting held on Östermalmstorg Square in Stockholm on July 28 was attended by members of all political workers'

<sup>1</sup> *Ny Dag*, February 18, 1936.

organisations, 83 trade unions, cultural, youth and other associations. Initially, this meeting was conceived as a demonstration to demand the release of the Swedish seamen arrested in Germany and to protest against the Berlin Olympics. The events in Spain, however, became the central issue at the meeting, which sent this message of greetings to the Spanish people: "We are closely following your struggle and we earnestly hope that you will uphold freedom and democracy in the struggle against the armed onslaught of reaction."<sup>1</sup>

Since then, the movement of assistance to Spain had an organised character. The Swedish Red Cross, individual trade unions, some women's associations started raising funds. Various organisations expressed in resolutions the moral and economic solidarity of the Swedish proletariat with the Spanish working class fighting for democracy, freedom and peace throughout the world.

On October 9, 1936 Sweden's Central Committee for Aid to Spain was set up, and an appeal was issued in defence of the Spanish Republic. It was signed by 50 distinguished personalities—trade-union leaders, professors, factory directors, writers, political leaders of various affiliations. The Committee was headed by Senator Georg Branting, a lawyer, the son of Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting, who founded the organised labour movement in Sweden. Georg Branting was already known to the international anti-fascist public as a defence counsel at the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti in America, the sponsor of the London counter-trial in defence of Georgy Dimitrov, a defender of Finnish fighters against the Lapua fascist coup d'état in Finland. He regarded assistance to Spanish democracy as one of the most important tasks in his life.

The setting up of the Central Committee for Aid to Spain contributed to a rapid growth of the solidarity movement in Sweden. Meetings of solidarity were held throughout Sweden. Spanish relief committees were set up in its various regions and "Spanish Sundays" were held, with hundreds of volunteers going from house to house to collect money for Spanish relief. Women's groups were set up everywhere to sew clothes for Spanish children. Kiruna miners donated their one day's earnings to the Spanish relief fund and called on other workers to follow suit: more than a thousand volunteers made rounds of 600 housing estates and collected in a matter of few hours a thousand bundles of clothing; medicines and dressing supplies were shipped to Spain. Within a few weeks of foundation the Central Committee handed over to the People's army six ambulances and sent three lorryloads of food to the Basque country. The Swedish S.S. *Sil* chartered by the Aid Committee delivered to Spain 200,000 kroner worth of foodstuffs, followed by shiploads of milk powder and condensed milk, sugar, cheese,

<sup>1</sup> *Ny Dag*, August 29, 1936.



tinned meat, flour and groats, footwear, cigarettes and other goods worth 240,777 kroner. The aid, however, was not limited to this.

The fate of Spanish children was a matter of particular concern for members of the solidarity movement. They proposed that 1,000 Spanish children be taken to Sweden, but Spanish authorities wanted to accommodate them in more habitual climatic conditions, nearer to their homeland. Therefore, the children were settled in France. Throughout the war, Sweden's Aid Committee met all the costs of maintenance of ten orphanages in France and two in Spain. The first Swedish orphanage staffed with Swedish personnel was opened in France in Chateau de la Brevière, the palace of the Swedish banker Asberg. Relief to children also took the form of patronage: factories, organisations and individuals maintaining one or several Spanish children. For example, personnel of the Scania-Vabis Motor Factory maintained 13 children during a year; women workers of a tobacco factory, 12; a railwaymen's childcare committee, 30. Newspaper editorial offices, teachers' groups, youth organisations and abstinence societies, as well as hundreds of individuals showed parental concern for Spanish children. In November 1937, when a large fund was raised for opening a new orphanage in France, Sweden's Aid Committee received the following message from the Spanish Minister of Education: "On behalf of the Republican Government I express my gratitude to you for this new proof of solidarity. Please convey our thanks to all members of your Committee and all Swedish organisations and anti-fascists working for this great cause."

The Swedish and Norwegian aid committees jointly organised a well-equipped hospital in Alcoy, initially having 125 beds and later expanded to 650. Swedish and Norwegian doctors worked there. In a letter of thanks from the chief of the sanitary corps of the Republican Army, the hospital was described as exemplary. "This gift is not only great material aid but also a moral encouragement to our heroic People's Army," the letter said. "We express our special thanks for this gift as an expression of the Swedish people's sympathy and solidarity with the struggle waged by the Spanish people."

Within the first year Sweden's Committee for Aid to Spain collected more than one million kroner, while during its existence several million kroner was collected besides large sums supplied by as many as 400 local committees.

The solidarity movement was not confined to material aid but combined it with broad-scale ideological work. In one year, more than 2,000 meetings were organised. This movement extended even to the army. Three regiments sent in a resolution signed by many soldiers and addressed to the "Embattled Youth of Spain". It ended with these words: "Long live international fraternal solidarity of the youth in the struggle for peace and freedom!"

Booklets having such titles as *Storm Over Spain*, *Spain for Peace*, *Life for Spain* and the like were published in scores of thousands of copies. Exhibitions and sales of paintings donated by artists to the Committee were arranged in the country. Prominent authors, many of them members of the Swedish Academy, published books about embattled Spain and the heroic Madrid. Spanish events inspired verses, which are considered classical today in Swedish literature.

The Spanish Aid Committee won the battle for Swedish public opinion. Voices in favour of Franco gradually died down. Editors of Social-Democratic and bourgeois newspapers, as well as many delegations went on fact-finding tours of Republican Spain. A delegation of Riksdag deputies followed suit.

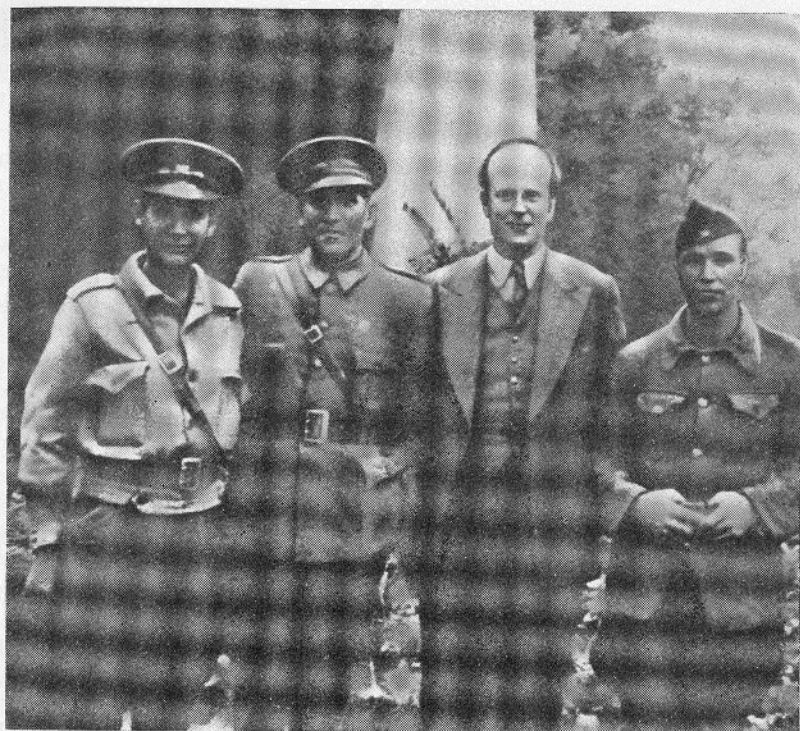
The second anniversary of the civil war in Spain was marked by a mammoth demonstration and a meeting in Stockholm. The Spanish Ambassador, Signora Isabel de Palencia, was presented with a banner, sewn by Swedish women, which bore the embroidered inscription, "To Madrid". Speaking at the meeting Georg Branting said: "Today, we convey to the working Barcelona, to the proud Madrid, to the beautiful Valencia, to the entire courageous Spanish people greetings from the Swedish workers, our firm handshake, a pledge to help them invariably to the best of our abilities."

The Swedish solidarity movement continued until the end of the war. On his return from Spain in the last months of the difficult and fierce struggle, Georg Branting said at a mass meeting in Stockholm: "I have come back from my visit to Spain with a heavy heart but with a firm conviction that at this difficult hour of trial the workers of all countries are staunchly supporting the cause of Spanish democracy. International solidarity has never been so strong as it is in these days so grim for Spain." One of the last appeals of the Aid Committee said: "Leaning on historical experience, we believe that the seizure of power by the reaction in Spain is an accidental and transient event. . . . We welcome the Spanish people in their present situation of a severe defeat, we regard their courage, their militant spirit and love of freedom as an example to be emulated by the international working class."

The Swedish movement of solidarity with Spain was expressed not only in material aid and moral encouragement without precedent in Sweden's history, but was also the people's conscious contribution to the struggle for democracy and peace.

The first Swedish volunteers arrived in Republican Spain in November 1936. The most distinguished of them were Karl Ernsted and the student of theology, Olle Meurling who fell in the fighting near Guadarrama in December covering with machine-gun fire his retreating unit. "Watch out that the red flame remains bright"—these words from Olle's last letter to a leader of the Swedish Communist youth became the latter's slogan.





Herman Wohlin, John Swensson, Raul Sederman, Sixten Rogeby

On the first day of 1937, a small group of people boarded a tramcar on Masthuggstorget Square. The group swelled at every station. On Järntorget Square, Holger Ekström jumped into the moving tramcar at the last moment. He was not expected to come: a fortnight ago he had announced his refusal to go; he was said to be infatuated with a girl.

The whole group gathered at the terminal: 12 Swedish seamen and one German emigre. On the platform, some news hunter attempted to find out what it was all about: Were the gentlemen going to Spain? No, of course not, some were going to Copenhagen, others to Dunkirk, two to Paris. When going away, he grinned maliciously. Those who remained alive learned later that he had written some nasty thing about them in his newspaper.

This was a well-knit team, all its members having a joint record of serving on ships, being on the waiting list at the labour exchange, visiting seamen's clubs, but the character of each was revealed only en route and in fighting together. Ragnar Skotte, an officer of

the reserve, was a syndicalist; Conny Andersson declared he was a Social-Democrat, and no bones about it; Helmer Hansson was a lumberjack; Krister Reutersvärd, a student just past 21; Herman Wohlin, a short and thin man in his middle years, was clever and extremely modest; Olof Liljegren, a gay and inventive artist; Birger Dahlström nicknamed "Rulle"; others were the reticent Erik Liljemark; a lean and sinewy man in shabby clothes with huge fists and a piercing look whose name was not known to anyone, everybody calling him "Crowbar"; Gösta Andersson, a fine singer nicknamed "Cuckoo"; the two Erikssons—Per and Rune nicknamed "Sebastian"; seaman Sixten Rogeby.

All were members of the first large group of Swedish freedom volunteers. Their route lay through Paris, Perpignan, Barcelona, Albacete, Murcia.

Slowly but surely, other Scandinavians kept arriving, and soon there were as many of them as to form a mixed Spanish-Scandinavian company. It was commanded by Ragnar Skotte; the Scandinavian platoons, by Gunnar Alm of Ystad, Kettill Repstock of Copenhagen, and Sergeant Major Herman Wohlin. They were elected commanders at a general meeting of the company, which was joined to the Thaelmann Battalion. Six Swedish machine-gunners were enlisted in the machine-gun company of the Edgar André Battalion.

The company was baptised by fire on the River Jarama in February 1937. Gösta Andersson gave this account of the evening of the first battle:

"Allan Eriksson, 'Rulle' and myself were in an outpost under an olive tree some 50 metres ahead of our front lines. As hours wore on, cold crept up our legs but we were all eyes and ears. Then we heard a faint noise just in front of us. It was the fascists, to be sure. We were on the alert, our rifles cocked. Allan went back to report to the officer in charge. The noise was growing louder as from a large body of men. We cautiously retreated.

"Well, now!" Skotte whispered.

"They're coming on."

"The boys were digging like mad, and deep trenches were soon ready. The first bursts of fire announced that the battle began. We had to take aim by gun flashes. By barrage of fire the enemy tried to strike panic in our ranks, shooting flares into the skies, but we held our ground.

"Suddenly, the firing stopped to bring a lull and badly needed rest. In the dimness of dawn I could see my comrades in the nearest trenches. Holger Ekström was seated with his back to the fascist lines, the helmet hiding his haggard profile, the bayonet sticking out. Other steel-helmeted heads popped up over the entrenchment. These were the elderly stoker Sjöberg, Lindgren, Feruström, Blomquist, Ivar Karlsson—all veteran seamen. A pair of merry eyes



screwed up under the helmet peak belonged to Conny Andersson, the only Social-Democrat among us.

"Herman Wohlin appeared among the trees, carrying a sack of bread on his back. Occasional shots disturbed the silence of our late supper. Skotte bent over a map.

"Then the first shell screamed, throwing up a fountain of earth. It was followed by others as if a satanic orchestra was tuning up, hissing steel hitting the ground and breaking up into fragments that made disgusting sounds as they cut into tree trunks. The earth quaked. The distant thunder of our artillery was like charming music to us. Machine-guns were rattling at a staccato, bullets whining angrily as they sprayed our defences. Some of our men were trying to dig still deeper into the ground.

"Three tanks were crawling over the field, spewing out deadly bursts of fire. They were followed by infantry, helmets betraying their German identity. Everything around us seemed engulfed in flames, the tanks' heavy machine-guns spattering lead like hell. We fired back methodically, no one panicking. The enemy assault was checked. Supported by tanks, we launched a counter-attack, carrying the fascists before us and into a valley. The fighting raged all day, our lines stretching like a bow string, then hitting back at the fascists who were invariably repelled. Many of our men were wounded or dying, but we would not budge an inch. But under the enormous pressure, we finally had to retreat slowly, jumping from one trench into another and fighting back like madmen....

"Then evening came. A group of Scandinavians lay under the Spanish skies, a few survivors of the group led here by their urge to fight fascism. Only two days had passed, and the fear of death was already gone."

Of the fifty Scandinavians roughly one-third were killed at the Jarama, the others, save for five, were injured, some severely. Among the dead was the company commander Ragnar Skotte. Axel Petterson, who had taken over from him, suffered a shell-shock the very next day. The third company commander, Per Eriksson, had a narrow escape when a bullet passed by a hair-breadth over the peak of his helmet, deforming it and ricochetting.

Of the 13 men in the first group of Göteborg volunteers three—Sebastian, "Crowbar" and "Laplandian" (Robert Lundström)—fell in the first few days. Skoglar Tidström, a man who had command of six languages, was among the wounded. Two months later he died in a Murcia hospital. What literary critics regard as one of Gunnar Ekelöf's finest poems is dedicated to him in the first place.

The machine-gun company of the Edgar André Battalion had 12 heavy machine-guns when it arrived at the front. Within a week ten of them were damaged in battle and some of the crews

that manned them were wiped out. The Swedish machine-gun was shattered by a direct hit, but none of the crew was so much as injured thanks mostly to Helmer Hansson who had been working with pick and shovel all the night before.

On the same evening, Krister Reutersvärd, one of Olle Meurling's friends from Uppsala University, was killed in an unsuccessful counter-attack. A few hours before, the Norwegian student Gunnar Skjeseth had got a bullet in the head, while the second machine-gunner, a Dane, was lightly wounded.

More volunteers kept arriving to take the place of the dead. When in early March the brigade was again hurled against the Italians advancing near Guadalajara, the Scandinavian fighting units were again reinforced to complement size, in particular, a quarter of the machine-gun company of the Edgar André Battalion became Spanish-Scandinavian, the damaged machine-guns were repaired. Here the frontline was not continuous, and fierce fighting broke out immediately at improvised, often changing positions with large gaps between them. As a result, the Scandinavian platoon was almost completely wiped out by a flanking attack of the fascists. One machine-gun was destroyed by a direct hit, the second gunner Karl Dahlström was killed, the first gunner Bruno Franzén severely wounded. The second machine-gun and crew were wiped out.

However, the Swedish company of the Thaelmann Battalion lost only a few men wounded, the company commander among them. This company took part in the famous Guadalajara offensive in which the Italian positions were overrun, and the Spanish Republican Government won its greatest victory in the national-revolutionary war.

Swedish units also took part in guerrilla warfare, in fighting on the Southern Front, at Brunete, Teruel and on the Ebro. They suffered heavy casualties, mostly during the mass retreat from Belchite in the spring of 1938 and during the fascist counter-offensive after the Republican Army had crossed the Ebro late in the summer of the same year.

Guerrilla operations of Republican units dictated the need for sending trained demolition men into the rear of the Franco army to cut enemy communication lines, blow up bridges, railways, munitions depots, and other military installations. This invariably involved numerous risks, because they had to travel on foot, at times many miles at a stretch in the enemy rear. Small groups were almost defenceless against regular troops, and although the population was friendly to the guerrillas, it was feared lest some-one be tempted to get a 25,000-pesetas reward Franco paid for every guerrilla captured dead or alive.

Karl Ernstedt, Gunnar Alm, Gösta Andersson, Harald Norrman and Oskar Svensson volunteered to take part in these raids



in the enemy rear. Gösta Andersson described some of them. One group was to move as far as Mérida and blow up a railway line a few miles off the town, exactly where Franco patrols had wiped out another group of guerrillas earlier. The raid went on without much trouble, the volunteers lying in hiding until nightfall, then moving on under cover of night.

"We had fantastic luck," Gösta told later. "When our destination was close at hand, a vehicle sped past, its head lamps spotlighting a sentry, who would have otherwise certainly noticed us and raised an alarm.

"When laying explosives on the railway bank we caught sight of several patrols; one of them passed literally a yard away from me, who was on the look-out, but failed to notice me. Our group planted boxes of dynamite chunks and fuses into the bank and set out on the way back.

"In five days, however, we ran out of food. One of the guides went to the nearest town to get some food but was discovered by a Falange horseman who sensed that something was wrong and immediately galloped in the direction of our group. A swift manoeuvre and good luck saved us from capture by Moroccan cavalry sent to chase us down.

"In the second raid, the guerrillas were discovered by woodcutters who were felling trees where the group sheltered. A lively conversation followed, guerrillas exchanging cigarettes for food and water. No one paid attention to one of the woodcutters being particularly interested to know the way the group would follow on its way back. He succeeded somehow in finding it out. We knew it when night came and the group went out into a forest glaze, where it was ambushed. The Spanish guide Venturas who was going in front fell on the ground. The group dashed back into the forest. It was senseless to fire back on the fascists, because they were excellently entrenched and outnumbered us heavily. But in front of us there was a road we had to cross.

"The volunteers waited until nightfall, and tried to fight their way. They were a success, because the fascists fired at random, failing to hit anyone. In the morning, the group returned to its base."

After the sweltering heat at Brunete and Aragon, the change to severe frosts in Teruel early in 1938 was an arduous experience. Northerners accustomed to cold suffered much less than Spaniards, but cases of severe chilblains were quite frequent. It was sometimes impossible to dig trenches in the ground cemented by frost. On the eve of the Teruel operation, the Scandinavians were transferred from the Thaelmann Battalion to the 12th of February Austrian Battalion, and some time later the formation of a Scandinavian Battalion was officially announced by Brigade Headquarters. Three companies were named after Georg Branting,



A group of Swedish volunteers

Martin Andersen-Nexö and Egede-Nissen. One of the Swedish officers, Holger Ekström, had already been appointed commanding officer of the battalion; it was also proposed that Birger Dahlström, also of the first Göteborg group, should be appointed commander of the Branting Company. On January 20, 1938, however, Dahlström was killed in action at Teruel, and Ekström was soon killed near Caspe. Conny Andersson who had been wounded on the Jarama and then took part in the fighting near Brunete had



both his eardrums ruptured by a bomb blast in the battle in Aragon and was evacuated to his homeland. After the death of Ekström the commanding officer of the Branting Company was Karl Ernstedt, and Bengt Segersson, commissar.

The last battle put up by the International Brigades in the offensive on the Ebro was described by seaman Gösta Hjärpe who had been severely injured by hand-grenade fragments in the fighting near Teruel and in a few months' time went into battle again.

"It was about 2 hours in the morning when we approached the Ebro, somewhere between Ascó and Flix, after a march during a warm July night. We were ordered to fix bayonets and keep complete silence. The company consisted of about 100 men, several young Spaniards among them. Herbert Blom, who was in charge of the boats, hurried his men to prepare a crossing. The first boat crossed the river. The next one was ours. We could hear frequent explosions of hand grenades. Several bursts of machine-gun fire came from the far bank, but the fascists had taken aim too high. Our nerves were on edge, the rowers working for all they were worth. As soon as our boat touched the ground, we leapt out and waded through the water, then climbed the steep bank and plunged into a field of wheat. Gusten Forsman, Sven Viberg, Gösta Andersson and myself, as well as three Spaniards, made up a group armed with light machine-guns. No sooner had we caught our breath and moved onwards than I fell into an anti-tank ditch so deep that it took me a great effort to climb out. A little later, we were again fired on, yet we went ahead guided by a telephone wire....

"Next day, we came upon a well-camouflaged machine-gun emplacement. Our company commander was ordered by the battalion commander to break through the enemy lines.

"'Charge!' came the attack order.

"This attack cost us many lives. We tried to break the fascists' resistance by machine-gun fire from a distance of 250 metres, myself and five other men changing cartridge drums in rapid succession while our company was on the move.

"At first, our men advanced some 100 metres short of the fascist lines. Those who carried the wounded from the battlefield had a hell of a job to do. After a brief respite, we launched another attack. But it was of no avail. After several attacks most of our men were killed or wounded. Repeated attacks on the next day proved equally futile.

"Only one platoon of our whole company remained active. The Scandinavians named this place the 'hill of death'." Gösta Hjärpe, who had been promoted shortly before this battle, was appointed commander of the "hill of death platoon".

In August, the company reinforced with new men from a training battalion, mostly Spaniards, and with new officers to replace



Members of the Göteborg section of the Seamen's Union and the Communist Seamen's Club. Standing in the middle of the upper row is Holger Ekström

those killed, took up defence positions on the heights of Sierra Pandols and Sierra Caballs. The fascists who had massed troops and military equipment at this section of the front exerted every effort to throw back the Republican forces beyond the Ebro, preparing and supporting their infantry attacks by devastating artillery barrages and air strikes.

On September 4, the Republican forces surrendered Corbera, but the Swedish volunteers were in high spirits all the same: new anti-tank weapons had been received, and many fascist tanks had been knocked out. But after the fifth fascist attack had been repulsed, the Scandinavian company was again reduced to the strength of one platoon. Kurt Svärd and Nilsson were wounded.

September 23, when the internationalist volunteers were recalled from the front by the Republican Government's decision, was the last day of military exploits of the men of the Scandinavian company. Despite machine-gun fire by Jorkers of Uppsala, the fascists succeeded in overrunning the positions of a neighbouring unit. The company was exposed to flanking fire from all types of weapons. Many were killed by mortar fire; two Norwegians were killed in a trench by a direct hit, Commissar Pedersen was also killed, Gustav Karlsson was wounded and his machine-gun destroyed, Gottfrid Olovsson, Lemponen and Åke Richter were wounded. Yet the company would not give up its positions.

On the evening of September 23, we were given orders to withdraw into reserve. Units of the 11th International Brigade assem-



bled on the bank of the Ebro near Falset. Only three Swedish volunteers remained in the ranks in the Georg Branting Company.

It was time the International Brigades were to be disbanded. Per Eriksson, who was sent to officers' training courses after the battle of Guadalajara and then detailed for service under Republican authorities, describes the parade of farewell in Barcelona:

"Early in the morning, the people of Barcelona gathered along the Diagonal Boulevard cutting askew across the city. They were factory workers, housewives, wounded soldiers, refugees from areas occupied by Franco troops, women with children, and orphans of the war. Hungry, tattered and emaciated by frequent air raids, they were waiting patiently.

"When the first ranks of internationalist volunteers in torn uniforms, just back from the front, appeared, it seemed a floodgate had given way. Women rushed forward with bunches of flowers, holding up their children to us. Calls of 'Salud!', 'Long live the Internationalists!' rang out over the huge crowd following us like the waves of a tide all along the length of the boulevard, hands upraised and waving.

"Awareness that it would be a long time before we could again see these people who had become so dear to us, thoughts of what would happen to them after we left and that soon we would get into clean beds and have plenty of food while they would be going on fighting and starving brought tears to our eyes and caused us almost physical pain.

"Of course, no one understood these people better than Dolores Ibarruri —La Pasionaria— who made a speech after the parade. When she mentioned those who were responsible for the war the faces of the listening crowd tensed from hatred of the fascists, and melted into a soft expression of sympathy when she spoke of international solidarity the Republicans had witnessed on many occasions and of the national solidarity uniting members of different parties in the struggle for the national freedom of Spain against the interventionist armies of Hitler and Mussolini. Referring to the international brigaders, she declared:

"They have given us everything they had: their youth, their mature years, their knowledge, their experience, their blood, their lives, their hopes and aspirations and they asked for nothing in return except but a place in the ranks of our fighters...."

"Addressing the international brigaders, she said:

"Political reasons are sending you back, some of you to your own countries and others to forced exile. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality."

"La Pasionaria was speaking on behalf of the people who had surrounded us with sympathy, who themselves needed sympathy;

she showed us the greatness of these people who were ready to give but loath to complain.

"This greatness has remained in our memory."

\* \* \*

The International Brigades which operated in Spain contained about 500 Swedish volunteers, of whom 162 fell on the battlefield. Others were crippled. None of them returned home in good health or uninjured.

The Canadian physician Norman Bethune who has won worldwide renown and gratitude as the organiser of the blood transfusion service which saved the lives of many of the wounded, presents in his memoirs a vivid image of the Swedish internationalist volunteer. A wounded man was brought right from a battlefield to a field hospital in Guadalajara. His bandaged head and face were covered with blood—a shell splinter had hit him in the eye and he had a mangled lump of gauze where his arm had been torn off, the other arm was about to be amputated. In a hardly audible voice he muttered a few phrases which only Bethune's colleague, Henning Sorensen, could hear:

"Ten days ago I was in Sweden. I have been in Spain three days. This was my first engagement, and now I am no more use to my comrades. I have done nothing for the cause."

"'Done nothing!' We look at each other with amazed eyes," Bethune recalls. "'Done nothing!' What modesty, what courage, what a soul!"

"Yet that is the spirit of the International Brigade; of 10,000 determined, unconquerable men, with no thought of themselves, with no thought of sacrifice, but simply and with a pure heart ready to lay down their lives for their friends. 'Greater love hath no man more than this.'"<sup>1</sup>

Those who have survived cherish in their hearts this love for the heroic Spanish people and proud memories of their contribution to its great battle against fascism.

<sup>1</sup> *Canadian Tribune*, November 30, 1964, p. 9.



## SWITZERLAND

The world economic crisis of 1929 hit Switzerland after a delay, but it lasted there longer than in other countries. The privations it brought in its wake to the working people stimulated an increase in their political awareness and activities. The political developments in neighbouring countries worked in the same direction.

The Swiss reactionaries who were intimately allied with international finance capital and had witnessed the emergence of fascism in Italy, the burgeoning of "national-socialism" in Germany and clerical fascism in Austria, sought a similar pattern to impose on their own country. A crop of pro-fascist organisations sprang up in Switzerland, and strong rightist trends were in evidence within the traditional bourgeois parties.

On the other hand, the mass of the working people were gravely alarmed by the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the establishment of the nazi dictatorship in Germany. Since the general strike of 1918 the Social-Democratic Party and the workers' unions became an influential force in Switzerland. Now the onslaught of reaction and fascism threatened to nullify all their gains. The workers protested by mass anti-nazi demonstrations. For example, the protest movement against the nazi frame-up in connection with the Reichstag fire assumed in Zurich a scope unprecedented in its history. The heroic struggle of the Schutzbund members in Austria and the successful rebuff given by Communist and Socialist workers to an attempted fascist coup d'état in February 1934 also contributed to the growth of resistance to reaction in Switzerland.

The Swiss Communist Party was small and its members were mostly unemployed—employers usually sacked a worker who had joined the Communist Party at the earliest convenience. Nevertheless, the Communist Party commanded a definite influence in Zurich and Basel in the cantons of Neuenburg, Waadt, and Geneva.

The victory of the Spanish Popular Front in the elections of February 1936 demonstrated to the Swiss working people that unity of action was bringing real fruits in the struggle against fascism. News of the success of the Left Forces in Spain was enthusiastically welcomed by the workers and progressive-minded intellectuals. The Swiss democrats followed with hope the development of working people's unity in France.

Monopoly capitalists and the upper bourgeoisie in Switzerland were scared of the Popular Front and went out of their way to prevent its formation. The government which guarded the interests of the ruling class paid lip service to democracy but in deed opposed genuine democracy with every means at its disposal.

Reports on the revolt of fascist generals against the Spanish Republic of the Popular Front aroused concern among the working people of Switzerland. It shortly transpired that it was not a short-lived revolt but a full-scale war. When it became known that the insurgents fighting the Republic were supported not only by soldiers of the Foreign Legion and colonial troops but also by German and Italian troops, aircraft and warships, a broad movement in defence of the Spanish people mounted throughout Switzerland. The worker press appealed for support of the Popular Front Government. Mass meetings of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, organised jointly by both workers' parties, were held in all industrial areas. The Social-Democrats and the Communists agreed on unity of action, which created realistic prerequisites for the formation of a Popular Front in the country.

Needless to say, these developments went against the grain with the ruling class. On August 11, 1936, the government confiscated an issue of the Social-Democratic magazine *Arbeiter-Illustrierte* featuring John Heartfield's photographic cartoon sarcastically assailing Hitler's intervention in Spanish affairs.

The Socialist newspaper *Tagwacht* wrote in its July 30, 1936 issue: "In response to the appeal to defend their homeland, the Spanish working class had taken up arms for the Government and Republic. It is fighting so well as to displease our bourgeois press which prefers armed fascists to armed workers, a fascist state to a republic of workers and peasants. The class instinct—the class interests! Solidarity of capitalists remains as firm as ever. . . .

Indeed, could they watch indifferently the Soviet Union thriving and developing? In that country, too, they organised rebellions to topple the power of the workers and peasants. When these attempts failed they were followed by the foreign intervention, then by a boycott, a campaign of slander, threats and abuse. . . . Spain is evidently in for the same thorny path."

On August 14, 1936, even before the agreement on non-intervention in Spanish affairs came into force, the Federal Govern-





A group of Swiss volunteers in Paris while on their way to Spain. Autumn, 1936

ment issued a decree forbidding sales and transit of any arms, munitions and military equipment to Spain, as well as to any other country for trans-shipment there. The decree of August 26, 1936, "On Maintenance of Swiss Neutrality" provided for up to 6 months' detention and a fine of up to 10,000 francs "for persons leaving Switzerland with the intention to take part in military operations in Spain or making attempts with this intention in mind, persons supporting or assisting from Switzerland in whatever way military operations in Spain and particularly those raising funds for goals far from charitable, as well as persons calling for or instigating opposition to this decree."

The decree also proclaimed that all money collected for such purposes was liable to confiscation and any meeting in support of one of the belligerent parties in Spain required permission from canton authorities, and might be banned by the Federal Government whenever necessary. Even money remittance to Spain was forbidden.

In defiance of strong protests from the progressive public these decrees, which under the guise of neutrality infringed the sovereign rights of the Spanish Republic with which Switzerland maintained normal treaty relations and which put the Republic's lawful government on a par with the insurgents out to dislodge it, continued in force until the end of the Spanish war.

But, despite obstacles and threats from the authorities meetings of solidarity with the Spanish people continued throughout the country, and money, clothes, woollens, foodstuffs, soap, medicines and other goods were collected among the people. Old clothes were washed, mended, and woollen sweaters, jackets, scarves, socks and gloves were made by women in knitting circles. Under Federal legislation collection of donations was allowed only for assistance to civilians and hospitals. Among the organisations active in this field were the IRA branches, the Geneva Committee of Aid to the Spanish People, the Basel Aid Organisation, the Organisation for Assistance to Spanish Children, etc. It is hard to overestimate the contributions from these organisations and their local workers' branches. They continued to operate after the defeat of the Spanish Republic and even after the outbreak of the Second World War, assisting Spanish refugees and servicemen of the Republican Army interned in French camps.

The Committee of Aid to the Spanish People sent to the Spanish Republic four lorries to carry food supplies to the population and evacuate children from bombed out towns. In October 1936, a fully equipped ambulance, as well as clothes, linen, dressing and surgical instruments worth 15,000 francs were sent from Geneva to Spain.

On November 17, 1936, the Basel Aid Organisation shipped to Spain eight large containers with clothes, 500 tins of egg powder and several boxes with warm clothes for women and children. The Zurich women workers' circle who met weekly, sent to Spain on December 5, 1936 three large containers with clothes and woollens worth 15,700 francs. Small workers' groups of assistance to Spain were set up in Lausanne, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Vevey, Chur, Davos, Biel, Winterthur, Schaffhausen, Grenchen, Arbon, Oerlikon.

Since the Red Cross on the pretext of neutrality soon stopped its relief supplies to Republican Spain, the public set up the Swiss Sanitary Centre which sent two medical teams to Spain. The Centre shipped medicines and dressing to Spain every week. After February 1939, these supplies were sent to a refugee hospital in Perpignan, France. Two Swiss physicians commissioned by the Centre worked there.

The Swiss working people's solidarity with the Spanish Republic was not limited to meetings and material assistance.

In defiance of all injunctions Swiss anti-fascists supplied money and foodstuffs to thousands of volunteers from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia who arrived in Switzerland illegally on their way to Spain and helped them get over the Alps to France. These actions demonstrated the great force of proletarian internationalism.

Yet the most brilliant manifestation of solidarity was the participation of Swiss volunteers in the antifascist war waged by the Spanish people. The first Swiss citizens to come to defend the





A group of Swiss volunteers from Lausanne

Spanish Popular Front against the insurgent generals were men and women gymnasts who had arrived in Barcelona for the People's Olimpiad in July 1936, shortly before the beginning of hostilities. The girl gymnast Käthe Hempel of Schaffhausen served as a medical nurse with a People's Militia unit suppressing the revolt. Other athletes joined the People's Militia company named after Gastone Sozzi which included Italian anti-fascists and Swiss citizens of the Tessin canton. Jointly with the Libertad Column of Catalonia they took part in the fighting for Madrid. Antonio Canonica of Tessin was second in command in the company. Several Swiss citizens joined the company named after Ernst Thaelmann which was among the first units of the People's Militia to fight at the Aragon Front.

It was not easy to get to Spain from Switzerland. This was experienced by 13 Zurich anti-fascists who were arrested in Basel on suspicion of an intent to join the Spanish People's Militia. They refused to answer questions by interrogating officers and went on hunger strike in protest against their illegal detention. Eight days later they were released on signing a pledge to comply with the law of August 14. This, however, did not deter the courageous anti-fascists from going to Spain.

These first volunteers were followed by many others. According to police evidence divulged by Judge Pfenninger at a trial of Swiss Communist volunteers in March 1938, 369 Swiss citizens

had left the country before the end of 1937 to join the International Brigades of the Spanish Republican Army. Of this number 119 were from the Zurich canton, the rest from Geneva, Basel, Bern and Tessin.

Of course, not all of the volunteers who went to Spain were known to the police. It could not keep under surveillance volunteers who left the country legally for France and Britain on the pretext of continuing their education or finding a job, as well as Swiss nationals living abroad. The exact number of Swiss volunteers in the Spanish Republican Army is not known but, according to indirect evidence, it might have been about 700. Among them were workers, handicraftsmen, students and intellectuals. Many of those who came from Switzerland were unemployed. The latter fact was repeatedly emphasised in verdicts of Swiss military tribunals who tried to persuade the public that the volunteers were motivated by material interest. In fact, they were tried for their political convictions. A typical example of judicial arguments was a statement by the very same judge Pfenninger who substantiated his demand for severe punishment of a volunteer in these words: "When handing down a verdict it should be borne in mind that the defendant is a person of thoroughly Marxist convictions..."

According to evidence published by National Councillor Marino Bodenmann in *Freiheit* on September 10, 1937, one of every three Swiss volunteers in Spain was a member of the Communist Party or the Communist Youth League, roughly 70 were members of the Social-Democratic Party or the Socialist Youth League. Most of the volunteers had no party affiliation. Many of them had come from places where Communist organisations were non-existent. Bodenmann happened to meet with members of Catholic organisations among volunteers in Spain. All the Swiss who fought on the side of the Spanish Republic had one trait in common: they were staunch anti-fascists.

Swiss volunteers had not a separate national unit within International Brigades. In accordance with the common language principle accepted in formation of units of the brigades, most of German-speaking Swiss joined battalions of the 11th International Brigade; French-speaking Swiss, the 14th Brigade; Tessin citizens, the Garibaldi Battalion. Swiss citizens of all language groups were particularly eager to join the Chapayev Battalion under Otto Brunner of Zurich. About 80 Swiss citizens served with it at different times. A certain number of Swiss nationals living abroad served with the 15th Brigade.

Since Swiss volunteers had, as a rule, good military training they served with all arms and services as snipers, artillerymen, motorcyclists, lorry drivers, and medical orderlies. One Swiss was a pilot, one a tankman, and one, a military band master. Swiss citizens were also to be found among guerrillas operating behind





A group of Swiss volunteers from the 11th International Brigade

the fascist lines. Many Swiss distinguished themselves in battle and were promoted to the ranks of noncoms, officers and commissars. Two were battalion commanders: Otto Brunner and Max Doppler, a native of Baden (Argau), who was in command of the Hans Beimler Battalion.

Many Swiss citizens were killed in action in Spain. Even an incomplete casualty list contains 76 names; in fact, many more were killed at the front. Among the war dead is Battalion Commander Max Doppler. The missing list contains 51 names, including the political commissar of a unit of the Thaelmann Battalion, Ernst Bickel, a student from Zurich. Twelve Swiss volunteers were taken prisoner by the fascists. Some of those who had survived in the POW camps came back to their homeland in 1939, others returned many years later.

At a time when Swiss anti-fascists were fighting heroically for freedom and democracy on Spanish soil, the Federal Government, the capitalist monopolies and all official Switzerland clearly sympathised with and helped the Spanish fascists. For example, the former counsellor of the Embassy of the Spanish Republic in Bern, Bernabé de Toca, a follower of Franco, held a reception to mark "Spanish National Day" on May 2, 1937 without any opposition from Swiss authorities. De Toca was received as a repre-

sentative of a foreign power by a councillor (minister) of the Federal Government. De Toca enjoyed the privilege of ciphered cable communication; the flag of monarchist Spain was hoisted over his residence. This meant a de facto recognition of the insurgents by the Swiss authorities.

Small wonder, therefore, that this gentleman was impudent enough to distribute to Spaniards living in Switzerland draft cards for induction into military service "in the national territory".

The Councillor of the Federal Government, Motta, even without waiting for the end of the war in Spain, granted Franco official recognition already on February 13, 1939, simultaneously breaking off diplomatic relations with the government of the Spanish Republic. Incidentally, when these relations were still maintained they were by no means as friendly as relations with the "government" of the rebel General Franco. For example, documents on the air raid over Guernica sent by catholic priests through the Spanish Embassy were confiscated by Federal authorities in contravention of diplomatic immunity, privacy of correspondence and neutrality. A similar anti-Republican stand was taken up by the owners of a condensed milk factory who agreed to sell the Spanish Republic 10,000 cans of milk for children only at a surcharge of 225 per cent.

Meanwhile, trains loaded with military supplies for Franco were departing one by one from the Basel terminal; according to incomplete data, 37 fascist volunteers from Switzerland fought on the side of the Falange and none of them was brought to trial.

Characteristically, the reactionary division commander de Dissbach visited the rebel General Franco on Motta's personal recommendation, whereas the Communist member of the National Council Bodenmann was refused an exit visa for a visit to Popular Front Spain.

The hostile attitude to the Spanish Republic was accompanied by baiting and persecution of Swiss Communists. Their apartments and offices of communist organisations were searched on a mass scale, and Marxist publications were seized. The government used every means at its disposal to thwart the movement of solidarity with the Spanish people and to intimidate its members. Reprisals were directed above all against the Communist Party.

A draft of Federal legislation on the maintenance of public law and order and security submitted to the December session of the Federal Council in 1936 envisaged imprisonment of Swiss citizens for what it called "Communist intrigues", for strikes and appeals to down tools, and forbade criticism of high-ranking army officers. The government was empowered to close down opposition newspapers for a term of up to one year, as well as to ban, "whenever necessary", the Communist Party and other opposition organisations. In contravention of the Constitution, the





The Chapayev Battalion on the march

Federal Council demanded that this legislation become effective immediately.

But this obvious encroachment upon legality went against the grain even with bourgeois deputies, so the government's demand was rejected. Reaction decided to act in a roundabout way, through the cantons. The death from a heart attack of one Spanish fascist at a meeting in La Chaux-de-Fonds was used as a pretext for fomenting anti-communist hysteria. In the cantons of Geneva and Neuenburg decisions to ban the cantonal organisations of the Communist Party were taken in February 1937 and approved in a cantonal plebiscite in Neuenburg on April 26, 1937 and in Geneva on June 14.

The attempt to ban the Communist Party throughout Switzerland failed, but Communists were expelled from a number of institutions and a ban was imposed on the activities of the Society of Friends of the Soviet Union, the International Red Aid and other proletarian organisations.

In the Waadt canton, the authorities banned the celebration of May Day in 1937 and refused permission for a public statement to the Secretary of the Swiss Communist Party and even to the extremely moderate French socialist reformist Léon Jouhaux. At the same time, permission to speak was granted to the French fascist Doriot, the Belgian fascist Degrelle, the fascist professor Guido Bartoletto of Rome and the high-ranking nazi official Sauckel.

The authorities attempted to use trials of "recruiters" of volunteers for the Spanish Republican Army as a pretext for banning the Communist Party. Already in December 1936, a number of searches were carried out in Zurich in an attempt to disclose the links of local Communists with Republican Spain. The police were haunted by the spectre of a "Central Recruiting Organisation". The first large trial of "recruiting officers" was held in a division court martial in April 1937. Among the defendants were Otto Brunner, who was in Spain at the time, Andreas Weder of Schaffhausen, Henri Trüb of Geneva and others. Indictments compiled with the aid of false witnesses, whose evidence was willingly accepted by the court, were enough to sentence the defendants to up to 10 months in gaol and to five years of disfranchisement. The defence lawyer, Dr Maag, proved that not the slightest evidence of the existence of a communist "recruiting organisation" was available. As a result, the trial furnished no pretext for banning the Communist Party.

In March 1938, the authorities staged another large trial of Communists. The defendants were three Communist Party secretaries and seven other functionaries. Despite the preliminary detention of the defendants for many months and the frame-up charges shrewdly devised by the prosecution the latter failed to prove the existence of a central organisation for the recruitment of volunteers to Spain and no grounds were again found for banning the Communist Party.

The authorities' machinations at the trial were exposed in a booklet entitled "Werbezentral für Spanien" (The Recruiting Centre for Spain), which was confiscated on the pretext of its alleged appeal to join the Communist Party, read its press, support the International Brigades, criticise the Federal Council and its use of what was described as impermissible expressions against the leaders of a foreign government.

In later months, arrests were continued, in the Tessin canton in particular.

On January 6, 1937, a series of trials were started, mostly in absentia, against Swiss volunteers fighting in Spain. In this connection, a struggle was launched throughout the country for the repeal of their verdicts. This demand was put forward at all meetings on the Spanish issue.

When in September 1938 the Spanish Government recalled foreign volunteers from the front, the question arose of their return to their homelands. The lawyer Léon Nicole made an interpellation in the National Council demanding an amnesty from the Federal Council which was declined by the Federal Councillor Baumann. This refusal caused a new upsurge of the movement for an amnesty. A Committee for Amnesty headed by Fritz Heimann, Dr Otto Wyss and Dr Karl Senn was set up. They were the first





Otto Brunner,  
commander of the Chapayev Battalion

to sign a petition for an amnesty and were followed by about 100 other signatories. They were joined by German emigres residing in Switzerland, including the well-known anti-fascist writer Hans Marchwitza and Erich Arendt.

The democratic press published reports of the participation of Swiss citizens in the operations of International Brigades. The popular commanding officer of the Chapayev Battalion, Otto Brunner, described in the press the courageous conduct of Swiss volunteers in the Spanish people's anti-fascist war.

Simultaneously, a counter-campaign was launched by the reaction.

For example, the pro-fascist press agency "Mittelpresse" labelled volunteers as "mercenaries" and "criminals". *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and all other newspapers supporting Franco opposed an amnesty, which they alleged may be "detrimental to trade with Franco Spain".

On January 2, 1939, Otto Brunner and another 63 volunteers came back to their homeland. In his statements at meetings dedicated to the Spanish people's anti-fascist war he invariably demanded an amnesty to volunteers. In this connection, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published slanderous materials against Otto Brunner, and he was arrested on January 12, 1939.

The Federal Council declined all proposals for an amnesty and offered all convicted volunteers to plead for mercy. Needless to say, the Union of Swiss Volunteers in the Spanish War categorically rejected this offer. On February 2, 1939, a petition for an amnesty signed by 80,000 persons was submitted to the government and was again turned down.

This gave military tribunals a pretext for continued judicial persecution. As before, the Zurich division court martial was the most reactionary one. It continued to condemn volunteers to long terms of imprisonment and to civil disfranchisement for three

years. Other courts considerably reduced imprisonment terms to 2-6 months.

Otto Brunner released on bail of 5,000 francs which was collected during three days, faced trial in May 1939. He could be indicted only for taking part in the Spanish war, not for recruitment work. As a result, he was condemned to 6 months in gaol and three years' disfranchisement. The reactionary press raked and raved over this verdict.

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The defeat of the Spanish Republic was a severe blow to the Swiss working-class movement as well. This was not only manifested in the failure of the movement for an amnesty, which proved futile despite the broad involvement of the working people, but also had a bearing on the results of the general political elections and plebiscites.

The unity of action of the two workers' parties was disrupted, and the involvement of the masses in the May Day celebration in 1939 was insignificant. The reaction was rearing its head everywhere.

Today he who would seek information on the participation of Swiss volunteers in the Spanish war in books on modern history published in Switzerland would realise that they are written by reactionary falsifiers. The Spanish Republic, if mentioned in such books at all, is described as a "red bandit dictatorship" and Franco as a "hero" who established "peace, law and order" in his country. Reactionaries continue to heap abuse on defenders of the Spanish Republic, servicemen of the Republican Army and their friends.

But it is impossible to hide away the historical truth or to efface it from the people's memory. Swiss citizens fought in the ranks of the International Brigades on Spanish soil for genuine democracy, for peace and progress, and inscribed a heroic page in the history of the Swiss people.



## THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

A most important condition for carrying out the grandiose programme of building a socialist society in the USSR was peace. Anxious to ensure a stable and lasting peace, the Soviet Government sought to establish normal relations with all countries. By 1936 diplomatic relations had been set up with thirty-two states.

After the end of the civil war and foreign intervention the numerical strength of the Soviet Armed Forces was reduced annually and by the early thirties it had fallen to 586,000 men. Soviet society was pervaded by the atmosphere of peaceful work.

In the first half of the thirties, however, there was a sharp deterioration in the international situation. The world economic crisis of 1929-33 exacerbated in the extreme the contradictions between and within the imperialist states. Imperialist circles saw the unleashing of aggression as a solution to these contradictions.

In 1931 the Japanese militarists occupied Manchuria which bordered on the USSR. Four years later, in 1935, fascist Italy began a colonial war against Abyssinia and invaded it. In the middle of Europe German fascism came to power and cruelly repressed working-class and democratic movements, proclaiming the cult of force in relations between peoples and not concealing its main aim—to win “Lebensraum” in Europe. Thus, the danger of war presented itself in both East and West, threatening not only the Soviet Union but the peace of the whole world.

The Soviet Government took all possible measures to rally the peace-loving forces of Europe and avert a new world war. In 1934, the USSR joined the League of Nations and put forward a plan for establishing a European collective security system. Non-aggression pacts were concluded with a number of states, and in 1935 mutual aid alliances with France and Czechoslovakia.

At the same time measures were taken to increase the country's defence capacity. Equipment, tanks and aviation were modernised.

The peace-loving foreign policy of the Soviet Government and the measures to strengthen the country's defence were supported

by the whole people. Hundreds of thousands of Komsomols helped to build up the Navy. Young people joined flying clubs and parachute schools, and passed the “Ready for Work and Defence” tests.

The spirit of proletarian solidarity and internationalism was instilled and strengthened in the Soviet people by the whole order of life in socialist society. Soviet people took a keen interest in the class collisions in capitalist countries and the working people's struggle against reaction and fascism, sympathising with their setbacks and rejoicing at their victories.

Moscow became a second homeland for those who had been persecuted by the black shirts in Italy and the nazis in Germany, for revolutionaries forced to leave Bulgaria, Poland, Greece and countries with fascist regimes. At the beginning of 1934, the soldiers of the Austrian Schutzbund, who had taken part in anti-fascist fighting in Vienna, were given a brotherly welcome in the USSR and found refuge there. In October of the same year, when the Spanish reactionaries cruelly suppressed the armed rising of Asturian miners who were fighting against the fascist threat, a wave of solidarity with the miners spread over the Soviet land. On the initiative of the women workers at the Dzerzhinsky Tryokhgornaya Manufaktura textile works, who gave up half-a-day's pay to the fund to aid the Asturian miners, the Soviet working people collected 3 million pesetas for the families of victims of fascist terror.<sup>1</sup> Many participants in the uprising, belonging to various parties, were offered political asylum in the USSR.

In the spring of 1936, after the majority of the Spanish people voted for the Popular Front at the elections to the Cortes, the Asturian miners returned home. They wrote in their farewell letter to the Soviet people: “We, the Spanish revolutionaries who had emigrated to the USSR, are about to leave this country. Our stay here has enriched us with experience and knowledge owing to the brotherly hospitality of the Soviet proletariat who did their best to make us forget the bitterness of our emigration.”

But six months had not passed before the reactionary forces in Spain presented an armed challenge to the Republic.

The military-fascist revolt in Spain, which began on July 18, 1936, and the complicity of the fascist states with the insurgents aroused angry protest in the Soviet Union. Meetings of solidarity with the Spanish people were held at many factories on August 2. “Our fraternal greetings to the working people of Spain, who are struggling heroically under the guidance of their government for freedom and a democratic republic, against the fascists, insurgents and betrayers of their country,” said a resolution passed at a meeting of Orjonikidze electrical engineering factory workers in

<sup>1</sup> Y. M. Teper, *Flames over Oviedo*, Moscow, 1936, p. 122 (in Russian).





A delegation of Spanish Republicans at a Moscow factory. Autumn 1936

Moscow. "Down with fascism! Long live the victory of the Spanish people!"<sup>1</sup>

Next day Moscow's Red Square and the adjoining streets were packed with people. The demonstrators carried posters saying: "The Spanish people's cause is our sacred cause!", "Let us give a helping hand to the Spanish people!", "Down with the fascist insurgents and their instigators!"

The meeting was opened by the Secretary of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, N. Shvernik. He and other speakers—P. Makarov, a worker from the *Serp i Molot* (Hammer and Sickle) factory, E. Bystrova, a worker from the *Krasnaya Zarya* (Red Dawn) factory, the writer A. Fadeyev, and Academician A. Fersman—spoke of the Soviet people's solidarity with the just struggle of the Spanish Republic against the insurgents. Those present at the meeting, which was attended by more than 120,000 people, sent an address to the President of the Spanish Republic, Manuel Azaña, and the Prime Minister, José Giral, and called on the people of the Soviet Union to send contributions to the fund in aid of the Spanish Republic. On the same day a 100,000-strong meeting of solidarity with the Spanish anti-fascists was

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, August 3, 1936.

held in Palace Square in Leningrad, and later similar-sized demonstrations of solidarity took place in Rostov-on-Don, Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Ivanovo, Odessa, the Donbass and many other places. Everywhere the working people unanimously resolved to collect money, clothing and food for the fund in aid of the Spanish anti-fascists.

In September the newspapers published a letter from Tryokhgornaya Manufaktura workers to women workers, peasants and housewives suggesting that they should organise food supplies to the women and children of Spain.<sup>1</sup> This appeal evoked a response among all sections of the Soviet public—factory and office workers, collective-farm workers and intellectuals. Famous figures in the world of science, the arts and literature made large financial contributions to the fund. "I welcome the splendid initiative of the workers," wrote People's Artist of the USSR V. I. Kachalov. "I am contributing a thousand rubles to the fund to aid the heroic Spanish people and call on all my comrades in the arts to follow the example of Moscow's leading factories."<sup>2</sup> The artists I. Grabar and A. Gerasimov and the sculptor M. Manizer presented their works to the Aid to Spain Fund.

"Each day begins with the thought 'what's happening in Spain?'" wrote the poet Nikolai Tikhonov in the newspaper *Leningradskaya Pravda*. "In these hard days we follow with great affection the struggle of heroes fighting for a new mankind and wish them a full and speedy victory."<sup>3</sup>

The famous Spanish writer Rafael Alberti wrote an article entitled "My Moscow" after a visit to the USSR at the beginning of 1937 in which he said: "Go into any home and you will find a map of Spain on the wall. Moscow, the Muscovites, are living our country's life, entirely at one with it. Moscow, 1937, is a town of brotherly love for my native land."<sup>4</sup>

Even the children joined in this universal outburst of solidarity. "My mummy and daddy told me that little children are starving in Spain..." wrote Anyuta Sosnina from far-away Daghestan. "I have decided to give the money I collected in my money-box—16 rubles 20 kopecks—to help the children of the Spanish people. I was saving this money to buy myself a present, but I have decided to put that off for a bit."<sup>5</sup> Children's and young people's newspapers received thousands of letters like this one.

By August 6, 1936, there was already 12,145,000 rubles<sup>6</sup> in the open current account of the All-Union Central Council of Trade

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, September 12, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Trud*, September 23, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> *Leningradskaya Pravda*, October 10, 1936.

<sup>4</sup> *Izvestia TsIK SSSR*, March 23, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> *Daghestanskaya Pravda*, September 27, 1936.

<sup>6</sup> *Trud*, August 6, 1936.





Spanish children arrive in the Soviet Union. 1937

Union's Fund of Aid to Republican Spain, and by the end of October this sum had risen to 47,595,000 rubles.<sup>1</sup>

Food and clothing were purchased and sent to Spain with the money collected by Soviet people. On September 18, 1936, the first ship, the *Neva*, set sail for Spain with food; it was followed by the *Cuban* and *Zyryanin*, then the *Neva* again and the *Turksib*. They transported to Spain about 1,000 tons of butter, more than 4,200 tons of sugar, 300 tons of margarine, 250 tons of confectionery, 4,130 tons of wheat, 3,500 tons of flour, 2,600 tons of smoked fish, 300 tons of lard and smoked foods, about two million tins of food, 125,000 tins of condensed milk, coffee and cocoa, 1,000 crates of eggs and also 10,000 sets of clothes, mainly children's clothing.<sup>2</sup> These transport ships were followed by many others.

The material help and moral support of the Soviet people to the people of Spain continued throughout the war. Thus, in July 1938 the second anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish people's anti-fascist war was celebrated all over the country by meetings of workers and intensified raising of funds for Spain.

In December of the same year it was reported that the trade unions and other organisations had raised another 14 million

<sup>1</sup> *Trud*, October 27, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

rubles, with which food had been purchased for sending to Spain.<sup>1</sup>

Press, radio, cinema and theatre all played an active part in the solidarity movement. The radio broadcast daily communiques from the Spanish Command on the situation at the front, and the papers published reports on military operations. The reporting of I. Ehrenburg, O. Savich and particularly Mikhail Koltsov, and the documentaries of R. Karmen and B. Makaseyev from Spain helped the public to feel the atmosphere of life in the Spanish Republic and the struggle of its defenders.

Thousands of factories and various public organisations, and famous workers, such as the miner Alexei Stakhanov, the collective-farm worker Maria Demchenko, the tractor driver Pasha Angelina, writers and actors, veterans of the revolution and school-children wrote friendly letters to Spain. Many of these letters and the replies to them were published in the Soviet and Spanish press.

The visits to the Soviet Union by delegations of Spanish working people and soldiers of the Republican Army and their meetings with Soviet working people developed into moving manifestations of solidarity.

With true maternal care the Soviet country took Spanish children under its wing. The first ship arrived in spring 1937 with a cargo of young Spanish children, boys and girls between the ages of three and sixteen from Asturias, which was now cut off from the rest of the Republic. By November 1938 there were 2,848 Spanish children in the Soviet Union. Special boarding schools were set up for them with the teaching in Spanish. All the Spanish children who came to the Soviet Union received a general and professional education, and many a higher education. Many volunteered to join the Soviet Army in the Second World War and, together with their older comrades who had received political asylum in the Soviet Union, took up arms in the defence of their second homeland.

The Soviet public, trade unions, women's and young people's organisations, Red Cross, International Red Aid, scientists and people connected with the arts took part in organising and holding international congresses and meetings aimed at combatting war and the fascist danger and helping the Spanish people.

The international authority of the Soviet state and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the example of the Soviet people's aid to Spain helped to promote a world-wide movement of solidarity with the Spanish Republic. The words of a telegram from the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), J. V. Stalin, to the General

<sup>1</sup> *Pravda*, December 8, 1938.





A recruitment notice inviting volunteers to join the Voroshilov Battalion of the People's Militia. 1936

Secretary of the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party, José Díaz: "The liberation of Spain from the yoke of the fascist reactionaries is not the private concern of Spaniards alone, but the common cause of all progressive humanity" served, as it were, as the motto for the world's progressive forces and an appeal to help the Spanish people.

The brotherly aid of the Land of Soviets produced striking manifestations of friendship for the Soviet people among the Spanish masses. On October 14, 1936, when the *Zyryanin* sailed into Barcelona almost the whole of the town's population came out into the streets. More than 200,000 people gathered at the port. Similar manifestations took place in other ports: Cartagena, Valencia and Alicante.

Subsequent events and years of hard fighting strengthened the Spanish working people's trust and respect for the Soviet country and their gratitude to it for its unfailing, all-round help. "The people... ascribed their salvation to the Soviet State," wrote the Spanish historian A. Ramos Oliveira.<sup>1</sup>

The famous poets Antonio Machado and Miguel Hernandez wrote some inspired lines on the Soviet country. In a poem on

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Oliveira, *Politics, Economics and Men of Modern Spain, 1808-1946*, London, 1946, p. 599.

the twentieth anniversary of the Red Army, Rafael Alberti wrote:

*Oh, how far you are and yet how near to me now,  
Soldiers of the great land, guarding over labour.  
The people turn to you, that the whole world may hear  
Tonight and I join my voice to theirs:  
"Let the heart of Spain beat in your breast!"*

The feeling of special affinity between these two peoples was enhanced by the similarity between the Spanish people's military and political situation and the position of the Soviet working people during the years of armed conflict with the whiteguards and foreign interventionists. The Soviet people's victory in the civil war served as an inspiring example for the defenders of the Spanish Republic and strengthened their faith in victory.

On October 20, 1936, on the eve of decisive fighting for the Spanish capital, José Díaz stressed the resemblance between the war in Spain and the civil war in Russia, between the defence of Madrid and the defence of Petrograd in 1918, and proclaimed the following slogan: "Turn Madrid into a Spanish Petrograd!" The soldiers of the Republican Army learnt revolutionary fortitude from such Soviet films as *Chapayev*, *We Are From Kronstadt*, *The Deputy of the Baltic* and *Battleship Potemkin*. The famous 5th Regiment of the People's Militia included the Leningrad and Kronstadt Sailors units.

Associations of friends of the Soviet Union sprang up everywhere. Streets and schools in Spain were named after Lenin. In spite of the difficulties of wartime the Republic made widespread use of the Soviet Union's experience in the sphere of public education; setting up workers' departments, evening universities, etc. Labour emulation and the Stakhanovite movement became widespread among industrial workers.

Communists, Socialists and even anarchists spoke and wrote about the Soviet Union as the Spanish Republic's best friend and a model worthy of emulation. "As Socialists and Spaniards," wrote the *Adelante*, a Socialist Party newspaper, "we admire and are grateful to this great people who has turned our dreams into reality. Russia is the older sister, showing the way to the proletariat of the whole world."

In a speech in Moscow, Professor A. Esbert of Barcelona University who was leading a Spanish delegation said: "The Soviet Union has extended the hand of solidarity to us, because it realises that our struggle is the cause of all progressive humanity.... We declare that we shall follow your example and, in doing so, we shall win."

One of the anarchist leaders, Buenaventura Durruti, wrote a letter to the proletariat of the Soviet Union which read: "Today



we charge you, the working people of the USSR, with the defence of our revolution, not trusting any so-called 'democratic or anti-fascist' politicians. We believe in our class brothers, for only the working people can defend the Spanish revolution."

The military fascist revolt and the intervention of the fascist states put the Spanish Republic in an extremely difficult position.

When the revolt broke out, the government of the Republic was certain that the "Western democracies"—Britain, the United States, and particularly France—would give it the necessary assistance to restore Republican law and order.

This was not the case. Under pressure from the Conservative government in Britain and French reactionary circles working for an alliance with fascism, the French Government refused to sell the Spanish Republic aircraft and other weapons and even put a ban on war material which had already been purchased and was about to be shipped to Spain. At the same time the French Prime Minister, the Socialist Léon Blum, proposed that the governments of the European states, including the Soviet Union, should sign an agreement to refrain from giving military assistance to either side in the Spanish war.

No diplomatic relations existed between the USSR and the Spanish Republic at that time. The foreign policy negotiations begun in 1933 had been broken off by the reactionary government of Lerroux, which came to power in the autumn of that year, and had not been renewed later by the democratic governments of Azaña and Quiroga.

However, the Soviet Union determined its attitude towards the non-intervention proposal by proceeding from the interests of the Spanish people and its lawful government. The Soviet Government constantly stressed that any approach to the problem of the Spanish war which restricted the sovereign rights of Spain's lawful government and placed it on the same footing as the insurgents, was wrong. At the same time the interests of defending Spanish democracy and world peace demanded that the Soviet Union should not refuse to be party to the agreement, which had been adhered to by 27 European states, supported by the Spanish Government itself, and welcomed by broad democratic circles in many countries who still believed that Léon Blum was sincerely intending to stop Italo-German intervention.

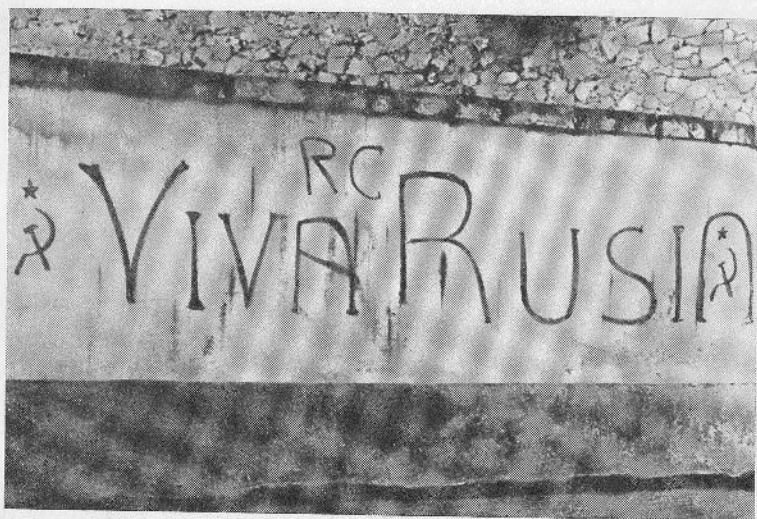
In adhering to the Non-Intervention Agreement, the Soviet Government put forward two essential conditions: (1) that Portugal should also be party to the agreement and (2) that the assistance given to the insurgents by certain states should immediately be stopped.<sup>1</sup> These conditions determined the policy of support adopted by Soviet diplomacy for the cause of the Spanish

<sup>1</sup> *USSR Foreign Policy. Collected Documents*, Vol. IV (1935-June 1941), Moscow, 1946, p. 180 (in Russian).



The Golden Book with a message of greeting from workers of a Madrid factory on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution





"Long Live Russia!" reads this inscription on a wall

Republic subsequently when the Non-Intervention Committee was set up in London with the participation of all countries which had signed the agreement.

The Soviet representatives on the London Committee tirelessly revealed the true nature and hidden main springs of the hypocritical policy of "non-intervention", the organisers of which publicly advocated neutrality, but privately helped the fascist invaders. From the platform of the London Committee the Soviet side made public and informed the world of the true facts about the aggression of the fascist states in Spain and about the crimes they were committing against the Spanish people. Thus, the work of Soviet diplomacy in the London Committee, which was represented by the Soviet Ambassador to Britain, I. M. Maisky, was one of the sectors of the international solidarity front with the Spanish people.

Almost at the same time as the London Committee began operating, diplomatic relations were established between Spain and the Soviet Union. On August 29, 1936, the Soviet Ambassador M. I. Rosenberg presented his credentials to the President of the Spanish Republic, Manuel Azaña; V. A. Antonov-Ovseyenko was appointed Soviet Consul General in Barcelona. This was important for the subsequent course of the Spanish people's liberation struggle and thwarted the plans of the fascist states to isolate the Spanish Republic.

The population of Madrid gave a joyous welcome to the first envoys of the Soviet country. "It is hard to convey the excitement

and enthusiasm which the arrival of Soviet representatives produced among Spanish anti-fascists of the most varying convictions. They were living proof that Spain was not alone, that the great Soviet people was at her side, that the Soviet Union was declaring its active solidarity with her."<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet Union took advantage of every opportunity to support the just cause of the Spanish people. From the rostrum of the League of Nations, at international conferences and through the normal diplomatic channels, the Soviet Government proclaimed the lawful right of the Spanish people to decide its own fate independently, without foreign intervention. When the open armed intervention of the fascist powers threatened to destroy the Republic and led the Spanish Government to request assistance of a military nature from the Soviet Union, it gave the Spanish people this aid as well.

The Soviet side on the Non-Intervention Committee, after constant futile attempts to induce it to pass measures against the increasing Italo-German intervention, declared at the meetings on October 7, 23 and 30, 1936, that the Soviet state could see only one solution to the situation—to restore the Spanish Government's right to purchase arms abroad—and did not consider itself bound by the agreement to a greater extent than the governments who were supplying the insurgents in defiance of the agreement.

Progressive people the whole world over welcomed the Soviet Union's firm, high-principled stand. On October 10, 1936 Romain Rolland, Pablo Picasso, Louis Aragon and the famous physicist Paul Langevin sent a letter to the Soviet Foreign Commissar M. M. Litvinov in which they wrote that on the two important occasions when the fate of justice and the right of the people had been at stake, in Geneva and in London, with regard to Abyssinia and Spain, the USSR made the oppressed voice of the world's conscience heard. The intellectuals, they wrote, wished to express their gratitude to the USSR for having safeguarded the indestructible principles of justice, dignity and peace in the present reign of chaos and obscurantism. Many intellectuals in Europe and America associated themselves with this letter.

The Spanish public welcomed the firm stand adopted by the Soviet Union. Commenting on the Soviet statement at the meeting of the London Committee on October 7, the Socialist *Claridad* said that the Soviet Government was tearing the mask off the fascist states and that the Soviet Union, with its 170 million people, had sided resolutely with Spain. "The farce is over. Russia has publicly announced that it does not consider itself bound. The Soviet Union's position is full of dignity. The USSR has

<sup>1</sup> *Guerra y revolucion en España 1936-1939*, Moscow, 1966, Vol. II, p. 105.





A meeting of solidarity with the Spanish Republic in Moscow's Red Square, August 3, 1936

taught the other countries a well-deserved lesson," declared the anarchist *Solidaridad Obrera*. "This is the first voice which has sounded beyond our country's borders in defence of the Spanish freedoms which are threatened by fascism," stressed the newspaper *El Liberal*.

It was then too that the following declaration was made by the anarcho-syndicalist leader García Oliver: "If the fascists ever attack the Soviet Union I will go and defend it. I am an anarchist. I shall leave aside all programmes and go there as a fighter, as a soldier, as a Red Army man."

Throughout the war Soviet diplomacy tirelessly defended the interests of the Spanish Republic. Of special importance among the numerous episodes in this bloodless battle was the struggle to stop piracy by Italian submarines and planes in the Mediterranean and Soviet opposition to recognising General Franco's insurgent "government" as possessing belligerent rights.

Relations between the governments of the Soviet Union and Spain were based on the most heartfelt friendship and collaboration. The exchange of correspondence between the Soviet leadership (K. Y. Voroshilov, V. M. Molotov and J. V. Stalin) and the Spanish Prime Minister Largo Caballero in December 1936-January 1937 is full of sincerity and trust.

A letter from the Soviet leaders read, in part, as follows: "We considered and still consider it our duty, within the limits of the opportunities at our disposal, to come to the aid of the Spanish Government, that is leading the struggle of all the working people,

all Spanish democracy, against the military-fascist clique which is the agent of international fascist forces.

"The Spanish revolution is blazing its own trail, different in many respects from the path traversed by Russia. . . . For all that, we believe that our experience, in particular the experience of our civil war, correspondingly applied to the special conditions of the Spanish revolutionary struggle, can be of positive significance for Spain. Proceeding on this basis, we have agreed, in compliance with your numerous requests conveyed to us through the person of Comrade Rosenberg, to put at your disposal a number of military specialists. These specialists have been instructed by us to give advice in the military sphere to those Spanish military leaders to help whom they are to be sent by you.

"They have been instructed on no account to lose sight of the fact that for all the feeling of solidarity with which the Spanish people and the peoples of the USSR are imbued at the present time, a Soviet specialist, as a foreigner in Spain, can be of real use only if he keeps strictly within the limits of an adviser and an adviser alone.

"We believe that you will make use of our military comrades in precisely this way.

"We would request you kindly to inform us of the extent to which our military comrades carry out the tasks entrusted to them by you, for, naturally, only a favourable attitude on your part towards their work would make their continued stay in Spain advisable."

The Soviet leaders went on to recommend the implementation of certain measures in the interests of the peasantry and the petty and middle bourgeoisie, and also measures to protect the property of citizens of states which did not support the insurgents.<sup>1</sup>

In his reply dated January 12, 1937, Largo Caballero wrote: "The help which you are giving to the Spanish people . . . has been and remains very useful to us. I can assure you that we appreciate it greatly.

"In the name of Spain and, first and foremost, in the name of the working people, we thank you with all our heart and trust that we shall be able to count on your aid and your advice in the future too. . . .

"The comrades whom you sent us in reply to our request are rendering us a great service. Their considerable experience is extremely useful to us and is an effective contribution to the defence of Spain against fascism. I can assure you, that they are carrying out their duties with true enthusiasm and exemplary courage. . . . I am most grateful to you for the friendly advice

<sup>1</sup> *Guerra y revolucion en España 1936-1939*, Moscow, 1966, Vol. II, pp. 101-02.





M. Litvinov talks to Julio Alvarez del Vayo, Foreign Minister of Spain. Geneva, 1936

contained at the end of your letter. I value it as proof of your cordial friendship and the desire to see a successful end to our struggle." In conclusion Largo Caballero described the measures that were being taken by the Republican Government in the interests of national unity.<sup>1</sup>

Soviet-Spanish relations remained invariably friendly until the end of the national-revolutionary war. After the resignation of Largo Caballero's government in May 1937 the new Spanish Prime Minister, the Socialist Juan Negrin, told the Soviet ambassador that he was "an ardent supporter of an all-round drawing together between Spain and the USSR, in the economic as well as the political and military sphere".

The Soviet Union helped the Spanish Republic to break the economic and financial blockade. In 1937 the USSR supplied Republican Spain with 457,904 tons of various goods at a total value of 92,444,000 rubles. The shipment of these cargoes was very different from usual commercial transportation.

Any vessel flying the Soviet or Republican flag was liable to be attacked by fascist submarines or aircraft and be sunk or captured by Franco. Between the beginning of the war and May 4, 1937,

<sup>1</sup> *Guerra y revolucion en España 1936-1939*, pp. 102-03.

86 attacks were made on Soviet ships, the *Komsomol*, *Timiryazev* and *Blagoyev* were sunk, and the *Petrovsky*, *Utoraya Pyatiletka*, *Soyuz Vodnikov* and *Smidovich* were captured and taken into ports held by the insurgents. The fascists attacked and sank vessels regardless of the flag they were flying if they were suspected of carrying cargoes from Soviet ports to Republican Spain. According to the statistics of the semi-official Italian Stefani Press Agency, Italian military aircraft hit 224 ships of various nations between 1936 and 1938.<sup>1</sup> In this situation the commodity circulation between the USSR and Spain in the first seven months of 1938 dropped to half in terms of tonnage and a third in terms of value compared with the first half of 1937.

Seeking to evade the financial blockade (the French authorities had sequestered Spanish gold deposited in Paris), the Spanish Government placed part of its gold reserves in the State Bank of the USSR, from which it paid for purchases made both in the Soviet Union and in other countries. When these reserves were exhausted the Soviet Government allowed Spain credit to the value of \$ 85 million in the autumn of 1938. The last supplies of Soviet arms were also made on credit. General Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros who concluded the agreement on these supplies on behalf of the Spanish Government in Moscow, wrote: "I can confirm before the whole world that the Soviet aid was entirely unselfish, to say nothing of the fact that this aid cost the Soviet people many sacrifices. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

From the very beginning of the fascist revolt a flood of applications from Soviet citizens who wanted to go to Spain to fight on the side of the people poured into Soviet public and governmental organisations. The Non-Intervention Agreement did not forbid the departure of volunteers, and in September 1936 several of them managed to leave. These were fighter pilots I. I. Kopets, Y. Y. Yerlykin, and A. V. Kovalevsky, bomber pilots and navigators E. G. Shakht, Z. S. Zakhariyev (Garanov), G. N. Tupikov, G. I. Tkhor, V. S. Kholzunov, P. A. Djibelli, I. I. Proskurov, G. M. Prokofiev, and A. A. Kheveshi, and engineers Z. L. Ioffe and Y. P. Zalessky.

Upon arrival in Spain they and volunteers from other countries joined the international aircraft units commanded by Spanish officers. These units were equipped with a small number of obsolete types of aircraft, which could not be compared to the Italian and German machines supporting the insurgents. In spite of this inequality of forces, the Republican pilots, Russian volunteers included, bravely joined battle with enemy aircraft and bombed enemy aerodromes, equipment and positions. After a few weeks

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, London, 1961, p. 634.

<sup>2</sup> Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros, *Cambio de rumbo (Memorias)*. Segunda parte, Bucharest, 1964, p. 192.

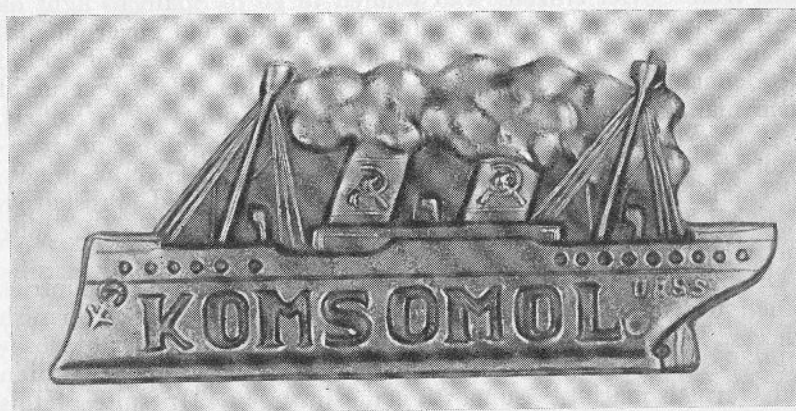


of combat and after endless repairs the Republican Nieuports, Bréguets, etc., were ready for the scrap heap.

The enemy's superior aviation paved the way for the fascist divisions' advance on the capital. The nucleus of these divisions was the well-armed and well-trained Foreign Legion and some fanatical mercenaries from Moroccan tribes. They could not be withstood in open battle by the government's troops which consisted of units of autonomous volunteer detachments of the People's Militia, poorly armed and almost without any military training. By the end of October the front line had moved almost right up to Madrid.

The government and the parties of the Popular Front, the Communist Party in particular, were doing their utmost to form regular military units from the separate detachments of the People's Militia. But the solution of this problem required two things: time and arms. Time was supplied by the heroic defenders of Madrid who stopped the enemy at the city gates. The arms came from the Soviet Union. They formed the material basis of the defence of the capital, the selfless exploit of its defenders—Spanish patriots and their friends, the internationalist volunteers.

Transport ships with war material obtained from the Soviet Union began to arrive in Spanish ports in the middle of October. The *Komsomol*, *Stary Bolshevik*, *KIM*, *Volgoles*, *Lenin* and *Andreyev* supplied 50 tanks and 100 planes, as well as armoured cars, rifles, cannon, mounted and light machine-guns, grenade launchers and various types of ammunition<sup>1</sup>.



The badge issued in Spain in honour of the Soviet S. S. *Komsomol*

<sup>1</sup> See *Latvian Soldiers in Spain*, Riga, 1970, p. 20; K. L. Maidanik, *The Spanish Proletariat in the National-Revolutionary War*, Moscow, 1960, p. 179 (both in Russian).



Soviet volunteers of a fighter squadron. Madrid, November 1936.  
Pilots (the front row, left to right): A. I. Tarasov (first), F. K. Zamashansky (third), I. A. Lakeyev (fourth), A. V. Minayev (fifth); mechanics (second row): I. T. Fomenko (first), G. Y. Konkov (second), T. I. Krupenin (third), S. I. Mikhailovsky (fourth)

Without delay the Republican Command with the help of Soviet volunteers put these arms and equipment to use in the battle of Madrid in late October-early November. The war entered a new phase.

In the autumn and winter of 1936/37 twenty-three transport ships with military equipment, arms and ammunition left the Black Sea ports for Spain<sup>1</sup>. This made it possible to form and arm regular brigades and divisions of the People's Army, to save Madrid, to win the battle of the Jarama and to rout the Italian expeditionary force at Guadalajara in March 1937. At the same time several groups of volunteers arrived from the Soviet Union with military equipment: pilots, tank men and other military specialists.

The appearance in the sky above Madrid of Republican I-15 and I-16 fighter planes which had arrived from the Soviet Union and were piloted by Soviet volunteers was one of the most impressive moments in the whole saga of the defence of Madrid. Let us quote the following extract from the memoirs of the Republican Air Force Commander, Hidalgo de Cisneros:

"In those critical days in Madrid the enemy aviation, both on the front and over the capital, flew completely unchecked. It bombed the town with impunity, since our air force was practically destroyed....

"On the morning of November 6 German Junkers bombers appeared, as usual, accompanied by squadrons of Italian Fiat fighter planes.... The sirens were still sounding over the town, giving the air warning, when a group of planes with the red

<sup>1</sup> I. M. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*, Moscow, 1962, p. 109; M. T. Meshcheryakov, *Spain on Fire*, Moscow, 1971, p. 54 (both in Russian).



emblems of the Republican Air Force appeared in the Madrid sky. Fast, powerful and agile they sped towards the fascist aircraft.

"It is impossible to describe my emotions at this sight. I was so excited that afterwards I was surprised not to have had a heart attack.

"No one will ever forget what the Madrileños saw that wonderful morning. . . . Leaving their shelters, forgetting about the danger, people poured into the streets, people who had been living in fear, suffering day in day out, powerless to defend themselves and their town against the enemy's heavy bombing. Now they were watching with indescribable delight the first air combat over their previously defenceless city. In the aerobatics of the piloting, in the chandelles, in the rattle of the machine-gun fire the Madrileños saw the Republican pilots shoot down nine enemy planes one after another, while the others turned and fled, pursued by Republican fighters.

"With tears in their eyes the Madrileños cheered the Republican Air Force. I was particularly struck by the fact that these cheers were addressed to the Soviet Union with an enthusiasm and jubilation impossible to describe. For I was sure that we had kept the arrival of Soviet planes secret.

"From that day the alignment of forces in the air changed for some time to come. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the months of bitter fighting for Madrid, almost every day, and often several times a day, there were aerial combats which did not die down even when there was a short lull in the military operations on the ground.

The Soviet Military Attaché in Madrid, V. Y. Gorev, wrote this about the Soviet volunteers: "It is impossible to describe the heroism of the pilots who joined combat with a superior enemy, lost men and machines, and went into the next battle with even more heroism and persistence. . . . The fighter force, although it was numerically weaker than that of the enemy, succeeded in protecting the town."<sup>2</sup>

The scope of this article does not enable us to mention the names of all the Soviet volunteers who took part in these heroic battles, or the engineers, technicians and workmen who assembled the planes at record speed when they arrived from the Soviet Union and ensured that they were always combat-worthy. From the total of 160 Soviet pilots who took part in the defence of Madrid we shall mention only the senior leaders and officers.

<sup>1</sup> Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros, *Cambio de rumbo (Memorias)*. Segunda parte, pp. 180, 186-87.

<sup>2</sup> K. L. Maidanik, *The Spanish Proletariat in the National-Revolutionary War*, p. 182.

Y. V. Smushkevich (Douglas) was senior air force instructor, P. I. Pumpur was fighter group instructor, S. P. Denisov, P. V. Ry-chagov, S. F. Tarkhov and K. I. Kolesnikov were squadron leaders, and N. F. Balanov, V. M. Bocharov, G. N. Zakharov, I. I. Kopets, I. A. Lakeyev and S. A. Chernykh were flight commanders.

At the beginning of November the Soviet high-speed SB bombers went into action, at that time the most up-to-date and advanced planes in that class. Faster than all the fascist fighters, the SBs carried out their combat missions without fighter cover. Under the general command of A. Y. Zlatotsvetov the squadrons of I. I. Proskurov, V. S. Kholzunov and E. G. Shakht bombed aerodromes and strategic targets both far behind enemy lines in the areas of Burgos, Salamanca, Seville, Cadiz, etc. and at the front.

The third type of Republican aircraft was the group of SSS bombers under the command of K. M. Gusev.

The Soviet volunteer pilots lost 21 comrades in the battle of Madrid, including Heroes of the Soviet Union V. M. Bocharov, P. A. Djibelli, K. I. Kovtun, S. F. Tarkhov and I. A. Khovansky.

The interventionist losses were incomparably heavier. In November and December Republican pilots brought down 70 fascist planes. But the main result of the air battle for Madrid was that it put an end to Italo-German air superiority. This in turn foiled the fascist plan to storm the capital using the tactics of the aircraft removing all obstacles and the infantry occupying cleared territory. The fascist pilots vented their spite in night raids, destroying residential areas in the town and killing women and children.

All attempts by Franco's generals to break into the capital were resolutely repulsed by its defenders. Franco was forced to give up the idea of a frontal attack on the city and seek to take it by encirclement. After replenishing his troops and receiving abundant reinforcements from the interventionists, he launched an offensive on the northwest of the capital (in January 1937), then in the southeast, on the River Jarama (in February) and, finally, in the northeast along the Zaragoza-Guadalajara-Madrid highway (in March). But these three offensives were also unsuccessful.

The fascist command's hopes that the defenders of the Republic would prove less combat-worthy and staunch in open battle than behind the walls of Madrid were vain ones. Now, at the beginning of 1937, the fascists were no longer confronted by separate detachments of the People's Militia as they had been in September-October 1936, but with regular brigades and divisions of government troops, subject to a single command and supported by tanks, artillery and an air force which the Spanish patriots proudly called La Gloriosa.

During the February fighting in 1937 on the Jarama, some big air battles took place involving as many as eighty planes at a time.





The bomber wing under the Command of A. S. Snatorov. Standing right to left: gunner S. I. Ivanov (first), pilot G. K. Starodumov (second), navigator V. M. Lavsky (third), navigator V. P. Baryshpol (fourth), navigator A. P. Ignatenko (fifth), Spanish gunner Matias (sixth), navigator P. I. Simonyan (eighth); sitting right to left: pilot P. P. Arkhangelsky (first), gunner Y. I. Torbeyeve (second), pilot S. A. Doyar (third), navigator G. A. Sbytov (fifth), navigator Y. V. Suslov (sixth). September 1937

But the Republican pilots invariably won the day. General Rojo, at that time Chief of Staff of the Madrid Front, had this to say in his book *España Heroica* about the air force on the Jarama Front: "The aviation collaborated with the ground troops in such a way that at some moments it was decisive. . . . The courage with which our pilots attacked and shot down enemy planes encouraged those on the ground to emulate them. The combat operations of our pilots exceeded all standards: they frequently did up to seven flights a day and each time engaged in combat. These conditions demanded a tremendous effort from the airmen.<sup>1</sup> In quoting these words Hidalgo de Cisneros notes in his memoirs: ". . . I must stress that at that time the Republican air force consisted mostly of Soviet airmen."<sup>2</sup>

The fascists felt the strength of the Republican air force even more on the Guadalajara sector where, at the beginning of March,

<sup>1</sup> General Vicente Rojo, *España Heroica*, Mexico, 1961, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ignacio Hidalgo de Cisneros, *Cambio de rumbo (Memorias)*. Segunda parte, Bucharest, 1964, p. 198.

only eight days after the battle of the Jarama, a fifty-thousand strong Italian expeditionary corps suddenly launched an offensive against Madrid, breaking through the weakly fortified line of government troops.

The Republican Command put all its existing aircraft into the attack on the interventionists' motorised columns spread over ten kilometres of highway. The aerial assault dispersed or demoralised a considerable section of the enemy forces while they were still approaching the field of battle. The advance guard of the Italian corps, which had advanced thirty kilometres, was stopped by reserve detachments of the Central Front, and a counter-attack launched by Republican infantry and tanks put the blackshirts to flight.

The French military journal *Revue de l'armée de l'air* had this to say about the rout of the Italian aggressors. "The skill of the governmental air units was indisputable in this engagement. These squadrons proved that they were manoeuvrable, energetically commanded, and well trained for attack in flight. The air command has profited greatly from the incredible impudence of the enemy command which one would be tempted to think inferior, if it were not more likely that certain successes in the Abyssinian war—against an adversary completely deprived of aircraft—have inspired it with too much boldness."<sup>1</sup>

To complete the picture it must be added that the bad weather in the Guadalajara area (rain, sleet and low clouds) was so unfit for flying that the aircraft supporting the Italian force (about 100 planes) did not risk leaving the ground during the fighting.

The tactical skill of the Republican Air Force Command and the Soviet volunteers was also brilliantly demonstrated during the Zaragoza operation on the Aragon Front in the summer and autumn of 1937. One outstanding episode was the attack by Republican fighters on the fascist air base widely reported in international military literature of the day. At dawn on September 25 A. K. Serov's squadron, supported by those of A. I. Gusev, G. P. Pleshchenko, and B. A. Smirnov under the general command of I. T. Yeryomenko, bombed the aerodrome at Garapinillos near Zaragoza where there were more than sixty planes. The attack was unexpected and not a single fascist plane had time to leave the ground. The anti-aircraft batteries were put out of action by fighter fire. Eight loaded bombers exploded and nearly all the enemy aircraft were burnt by incendiary bombs.

Taking into account the losses on the Jarama and at Guadalajara, the Italo-German interventionists increased supplies of war materials, particularly aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery to the insurgents. New units of the Italian regular air force and the

<sup>1</sup> *Revue de l'armée de l'air*, No. 96, July 1937, p. 814.



German Condor Legion also arrived in Spain. "Mussolini and Hitler have sent full-strength units to Spain," wrote the French journal *Revue militaire générale*.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the supply of Soviet equipment became increasingly more difficult. Several transport ships from the Soviet Union carrying arms, planes and tanks were sunk by Italian submarines.

The interventionists sought to surpass the Republican Air Force technically as well. From the middle of 1937 the latest German planes—the Messerschmitt-109 fighter and the Heinkel-111 bomber—and also the Italian bomber Savoia-79 appeared in Spain. In some respects they not only equalled the Soviet planes but excelled them. In these conditions the personal qualities of the Soviet airmen and all the Republican pilots came to the fore even more vividly in the second and third years of the war, qualities which the fascists were never able to excel.

Foreign military specialists noted that the Republican Air Force possessed a factor which counterbalanced the numerical and even technical inferiority of their machines—a high morale. "It has happened that a single squadron of Moskas<sup>2</sup> has forced three Italian Fiat squadrons to stop attacking," wrote the French General Armengaud after a visit to the fronts in Spain. "The Moskas, which do 450 kilometres an hour, give an idea of the importance of speed for the fighter plane, both by the fear which they inspire in their adversaries and by the daring of the pilots who fly them. . . . The importance of manoeuvrability for a fighter plane is clearly demonstrated by the Chato. The pilots have such confidence in the manipulability of their machine that they. . . are not afraid of any faster enemy planes. They have brought down Messerschmitts."<sup>3</sup> The writer gives examples of Chatos shooting down fascist bombers raiding Republican towns at night.<sup>4</sup>

The boldness and courage of the Republic's defenders, be they Soviet airmen, Spanish pilots or their internationalist friends, were born of the faith in the justice of their cause. Fighting a numerically superior enemy was the rule rather than the exception for Soviet volunteers and the whole Republican Air Force throughout the war. Yet the fascists almost invariably suffered heavier losses than the Republicans. Let us quote two examples.

On July 18, 1937, the whole of Madrid watched 40 Fiats, which had appeared at the height of the battle of Brunete over

<sup>1</sup> *Revue militaire générale*, No. 4, 1938, p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> The Madrileños had their own nicknames for their favourite Soviet fighters. The I-15 with its characteristically shaped engine section was often called "Chato", which means "snub-nosed" and the monoplane I-16, "Moska", i.e. "fly". These names were even used officially and figured in war communications.

<sup>3</sup> *Revue militaire générale*, No. 4, 1938, pp. 433, 436-37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438-39.

the University City, being counter-attacked by 20 Republican fighters. The battle was on. Another 8 Messerschmitts joined in. The enemy lost six planes in this engagement, and all the Soviet aircraft returned safely to base.<sup>1</sup>

A year later, in August 1938 and the following months, when the largest offensive for the last two years was taking place on the right bank of the Ebro, Republican pilots fought several successful battles against superior enemy forces. Thus, on August 14 they brought down 19 enemy planes and lost one, on August 24 they destroyed 7 planes, losing two of their own. A report from the French Havas News Agency on August 29 said that in twenty-five days of fighting on the Ebro Front Republican pilots had brought down 93 enemy planes, losing 18 of their own.<sup>2</sup> These figures reflect the superiority of the Republican airmen over the fascist mercenaries. It is important to stress that by the time of the battle of the Ebro there was a completely new set of Soviet volunteers, yet the new airmen of the squadrons commanded by P. T. Korobkov, S. I. Gritsevets and N. S. Gerasimov fought just as bravely and selflessly as the first air defenders of Madrid.

By now most of the Republican Air Force was made up of young Spanish patriots under the command of squadron leaders Ariás, Bravo, Morquillas, Pereiro, Zarauz and others who had received their training in Soviet flying schools and gained experience fighting side by side with their Soviet friends.

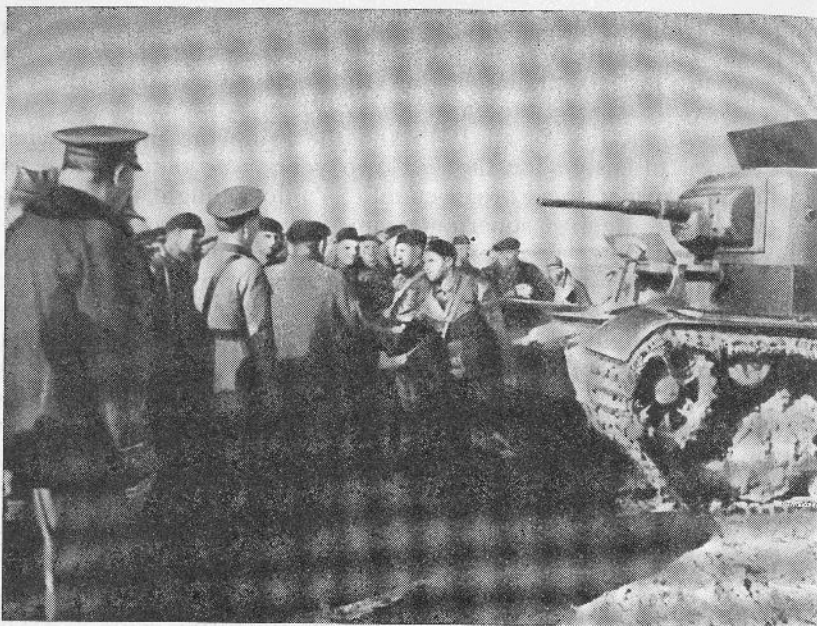
However, neither the high degree of military skill, nor the bravery and courage of the Republican pilots, or their tactical victories in air combats with the enemy could retain Republican supremacy in the air. Already by the Teruel operation (December 1937-February 1938) the interventionists and insurgents had five to six times more planes than the Republicans. The gap widened in 1938. In giving cover to their bombers or repulsing enemy raids, the Republican pilots dealt telling blows to the Fiats, Messerschmitts and Heinkels, but were unable through lack of planes to clear the skies of them altogether. In the meantime planes from the Soviet Union, packed in containers, were gathering dust in French ports or railway warehouses in the name of "non-intervention".

The Republican Army had practically no tank units at the beginning of the war. The first group of Soviet tank men arrived with T-26 tanks acquired by the Spanish Government from the Soviet Union. It consisted of eighty volunteers led by S. M. Krivoshein. The first task was to train Spaniards for the formation of Republican tank units. With this aim in mind the War Ministry set up a training centre in Archena under Colonel Paredes. The situation

<sup>1</sup> B. Smirnov, *Spanish Wind*, Moscow, 1963, pp. 116-18 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda*, August 29, 1938.





The War Minister of the Spanish Republic, Largo Caballero, meets Soviet volunteer tank men. December 1936

at the front demanded, however, that the tanks should be used in combat and that the Soviet volunteers should join in the defence of Madrid before the Spanish tank crews had been trained.<sup>1</sup>

In the first engagement at the southern approaches to Madrid on October 29, 1936 in the area of Seseña the tank men in the company commanded by Captain Paul Armand (15 tanks, 34 Soviet and 11 Spanish tank men) showed extraordinary courage, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and checking its advance in the sector in question. From that day onwards for several weeks during which the fate of the capital was in the balance, Spanish and Soviet tank men in T-26s never left the front. They were the only mobile striking force, always ready on orders from the Madrid Front Command to attack the enemy in a threatened sector and support the infantry. "The tank men were in constant combat," recalls Dolores Ibarruri, "and most of the time without the support of the infantry.... The Republican tanks would surprise the enemy, destroying its artillery batteries and spreading panic in its ranks. From dawn to dusk the tank men cleared the enemy from the approaches to the town, returned when it was dark, spent the

<sup>1</sup> *Latvian Fighters in Spain*, p. 24.

night repairing their machines and, against all technical norms and all standards of human stamina—for both people and machines can only work up to a certain limit—returned to battle the following morning. Many of these heroes were Soviet tank men...."<sup>1</sup>

By the end of November 1936 as a result of intense military action most of the machines were out of action and in need of basic repairs. The ranks of the tank men were depleted. N. A. Selitsky, S. M. Bystrov, D. P. Mozylev and P. Y. Kupriyanov had been killed in action and S. K. Osadchy had been mortally wounded. A. I. Klimov, I. M. Lobach and driver-mechanic P. V. Mikolich had been killed fighting behind enemy lines. Many tank men had been wounded.

The casualties were made good at the end of November 1936 by the arrival of a second group of volunteer tank men. Their leader, D. G. Pavlov, was appointed commander of the 1st Tank Brigade by the Spanish Government. It was equipped with newly arrived T-26 tanks and continued to receive reinforcements of this type of tank acquired from the Soviet Union. Another type of tank, the BT (a fast model), which arrived in Spain in the summer of 1937, was used to form an international tank regiment commanded by S. I. Kondratyev.

Soviet volunteer tank men took part in all the important battles from autumn 1936 to spring 1938. No offensive or defensive operation by the Republican troops would have been conceivable without tank support. The Soviet Union supplied the Republic with the best gunned tanks of the day, which were used by the Red Army. The tactical and technical qualities of these tanks remained unexcelled right up to the end of the Spanish war. In 1938 the French journal *Revue militaire générale* acknowledged "the defeat of the German and Italian tanks used in Spain".<sup>2</sup> Military specialists in other countries also reached the same conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

The Republican tanks' worst enemy, particularly during offensives, was not the insurgents' tanks but the artillery with which the interventionists so lavishly supplied General Franco. Yet in active defence and counter-attack the blows of the Republican tanks were deadly. This was the case on the front to the northwest of Madrid in January 1937 and particularly in the bloody three-week battle of the Jarama, where, to quote General Rojo, "the tanks played an exceptionally important role...."<sup>4</sup> Under battalion commanders M. P. Petrov and I. F. Urban and company commanders G. M. Skleznyov, D. D. Pogodin and V. I. Baranov the tank men saved the day on many occasions, rolling back and

<sup>1</sup> Dolores Ibarruri, *El Unico camino*, Havana, 1962, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue militaire générale*, No. 9, 1938, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *The Field Artillery Journal*, (USA), May-June, 1938, p. 188; *Revue militaire suisse*, No. 2, 1938, pp. 91-92.

<sup>4</sup> General Vicente Rojo, *España heroica*, p. 61.





Soviet volunteer tank men. January 1937

destroying groups of Moroccans and Legionaries who were advancing on the Madrid-Valencia road.

The experience acquired by Soviet volunteers and their Spanish comrades-in-arms during this fighting was put to good use in the battles of Guadalajara and Brunete and all subsequent operations. At Guadalajara a company of seven tanks, which had been dispatched against the motorised forward troops of the Italian corps when the news had first arrived of the interventionists' offensive, bravely attacked them and halted their advance for a whole day, March 8, 1937, together with an infantry battalion. Later, when the reserves of the Central Front arrived, the whole of Pavlov's tank brigade took part in a victorious counter-offensive by the Republican troops against the Italian fascists, paving the way for the infantry. In the Brunete offensive the tank men inflicted heavy losses, attacking Quijorna, Villanueva and Los Llanos, fortified centres of fascist defence, helping the advancing Republican brigades to capture them and then hold the new line.

Here are a few of the numerous examples of the Soviet volunteers' high morale. At the Jarama Vasily Novikov, tank commander, held the enemy at bay for a whole day in a tank which had been damaged by an enemy shell between Republican and enemy positions. The commander and the driver-mechanic were wounded

and the gunner was killed. Novikov did not leave the machine until help arrived at nightfall and the tank was towed out of the danger zone. In hospital it was discovered that Novikov had thirteen wounds.

Tank Company Commander P. A. Tsaplin showed similar fortitude in the battle of Teruel in January 1937. Wounded and in a damaged tank he kept the enemy at bay for eight hours, then managed to get back to his unit. In the same battle Tank Commander K. Y. Bilibin got out of his machine under artillery and machine-gun fire, repaired a damaged track and drove his tank into action. He was killed later on the Jarama, saving the crew of a damaged tank.

Soviet and Spanish tank men vied with each other in their heroism. At Guadalajara Ernesto Ferrero's tank platoon ambushed and destroyed up to 20 Italian Ansaldos and a column of lorries with infantry. There too the volunteer A. G. Abramovich and his platoon raised a Republican infantry company into attack, capturing four guns, machine-guns and many rifles. He was killed on July 10 in the attack on Brunete. In a battle at Majadahonda (northwest of Madrid) Tank Company Commander G. M. Skleznyov crawled up to a burning tank which had been abandoned by its wounded crew and drove it out of range of enemy fire. In February 1937, he and his company counter-attacked Moroccan troops who had crossed the Pindoque Bridge on the Jarama and made them retreat. The next day he was killed in a counter-attack. Skleznyov's brave feat was repeated by N.C.O. Viktor Novikov. On October 13, 1937, at Fuentes del Ebro in an offensive which was the bitterest and most bloody of the whole war for tank men, Novikov rescued a burning tank, in spite of wounds and severe burns. Many other Soviet volunteer tank men and their comrades-in-arms, the Spaniards and members of the International Brigades, displayed exceptional courage and stamina that day. Encircled by the enemy tank commanders S. Y. Laputin and P. A. Semyonov fought to the last bullet and managed to get their wounded teammates back to Republican positions. Sixteen Soviet tank men laid down their lives at Fuentes del Ebro.

The training of Spanish tank men at the centre in Archena under the guidance of Soviet instructors was going ahead successfully. By autumn 1937 all T-26 crews, and by summer 1938 all BT crews as well, were made up of Spanish officers and men. Only a few Soviet tank men remained in Spain, working as instructors and advisers in the armoured brigades until the end of the war.

The Spanish Navy played an important part in the plans of the fascist insurgents. The vast majority of the naval officers, who constituted a particularly privileged and select caste, joined in the conspiracy against the Republic. But at the moment of insurrection, thanks to the political awareness and alertness of the seamen and



non-commissioned officers, most of the ships remained loyal to the Republic, although they lost nearly all their officer personnel. "Squadrons commanded by sergeants" was the description given to the Republican Navy in those days.

Soviet naval specialists invited by the Spanish Government as advisers (N. G. Kuznetsov, V. A. Alafuzov, N. Y. Basisty, N. O. Abramov, N. G. Pitersky, S. G. Sapozhnikov, G. A. Zhukov and others) concentrated mainly on helping the Republican Command to obtain military cargoes by sea. Warships, acting in accordance with a specially drawn-up time-table for each given case, met transports from the Soviet Union in open sea as they left North African territorial waters and escorted them to Spanish Mediterranean ports. The advisers also helped the Naval Command and individual ships to solve other military problems. A group of Soviet specialists — A. G. Golovko, V. P. Drozd, S. S. Ramishvili and others—worked as members of Naval staffs and at the Cartagena Naval base. I. D. Yelisseyev, V. L. Bogdenko and other specialists were posted on board individual ships.

Some of the volunteer navy men were appointed submarine and torpedo boat commanders. I. A. Burmistrov, I. V. Grachov, N. P. Yegipko, V. A. Yegorov, G. Y. Kuzmin and S. P. Lisin were in command of submarines at various times; A. P. Batrakov, V. P. Likholetov, S. A. Osipov and others, of torpedo boats, the crews of which were composed mainly of Soviet volunteers due to the lack of trained personnel in Spain.

I. A. Burmistrov and N. P. Yegipko became famous for the hazardous journeys which their submarines made from France, where they had been repaired, along the Atlantic coast of the Pyrenean Peninsula through the Straits of Gibraltar to Cartagena, i.e., a route almost entirely controlled by the fascists.

Soviet Army advisers made a substantial contribution to the defence of the Republic and the building up of the Republican Army. Contrary to the lies spread by anti-Republican propaganda, these advisers did not and could not play a leading role in the Republican Army. The principle of "help, not command" was strictly observed by them at all levels. They were equally consistent in observing the rule of professional collaboration with all Republican officers, regardless of their party affiliations.

Thanks to their experience and the trust which officers devoted to the Republic felt for the Soviet Union, the advisers helped to improve the army build-up, to devise methods of managing the troops and planning front operations. It was to a certain extent under the influence of these advisers that the tactics of passive defence employed during the first few months of the war were replaced by the tactics of active defence, the use of all means to inflict blows upon the insurgents and interventionists. The advisers helped the Spanish Command and staffs to make proper use of the

new Soviet equipment. They also helped staffs draw up regulations, instructions and rules on the training of troops and the use of various types of weapons.

The Soviet Government recommended experienced military men as advisers. The post of chief adviser was held consecutively by Y. K. Berzin (1936-37), G. M. Stern (1937-38) and K. M. Kachanov (1938-39).

The following Soviet military specialists served as advisers in the central apparatus of the Republican Armed Forces: P. A. Ivanov, K. A. Meretskov, B. M. Simonov and V. P. Butyrsky (General Staff); I. N. Nesterenko and D. G. Kolesnikov (General Military Commissariat); A. I. Bergolts, Y. V. Smushkevich, I. S. Galtsev, V. N. Lopatin, Y. S. Ptukhin, A. F. Agaltsov, A. P. Andreyev, F. K. Arzhanukhin, and A. P. Sharapov (Air Force Staff); N. N. Voronov, N. A. Klich, V. I. Goffe and M. P. Dmitriyev (Artillery Staff); Y. A. Tykin and N. N. Nagorny (Air Defence Staff); and the doctors I. A. Klyuss and A. A. Veliky (Medical Administration).

The following advisers were attached to front staffs and commands: R. Y. Malinovsky, M. S. Shumilov, P. I. Batov, I. G. Kulik, I. A. Maximov, A. M. Mokrousov, I. G. Chusov, V. A. Yushkevich, N. P. Ivanov, P. P. Vechny, V. Y. Kolpakchi, V. I. Kumelan, V. A. Frolov, D. M. Kovalyov, P. I. Lyapin, E. V. Toikko and M. I. Nedelin.

Advisers to the commands of army corps, divisions and brigades N. I. Biryukov, N. G. Lyashchenko, V. T. Maslov, P. G. Novikov, A. I. Pomoshnikov, Y. G. Trotsenko, M. Y. Khvatov (Kharchenko), S. Y. Churilov and others, and Soviet instructors working under them helped Spanish officers and men, and volunteers from other countries, to use Soviet weapons and to train units tactically for various forms of combat.

In the breathing spells between large operations the whole Republican Army turned into an enormous training school with both officers and men as the pupils. There was a great need for instructors. Spanish officers with a military training were few in the brigades, and the Republican Command gratefully accepted the help of Soviet advisers and instructors.

The difficulties involved in their not knowing Spanish were overcome with the help of interpreters, mainly graduates from higher educational establishments in Moscow and Leningrad. They went to Spain as volunteers and performed their duties bravely.

Machine-gun and artillery instructors A. I. Rodimtsev, N. P. Guryev, D. A. Tsyurupa, I. N. Tatarinov, Y. N. Ishchenko, Y. B. Izvekov, I. A. Semyonov, V. M. Podgoretsky, N. A. Boiko, N. D. Pidorenko, M. M. Plyukhin, N. G. Lyashchenko, P. G. Novikov and others carried out their duties selflessly on the front line under



enemy fire. Guerrilla detachment advisers and instructors Kh. D. Mamsurov, I. G. Starinov, A. K. Sprogis, V. A. Troyan, K. P. Orlovsky and others frequently went on important reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines and showed exemplary courage, resourcefulness and bravery.

Among those who lost their lives on Spanish soil were instructors N. A. Boiko, V. I. Dmitriyev, and V. D. Tsvetkov and advisers V. M. Buskhin, I. G. Pidgola, I. F. Skalko and A. P. Fomin.

A group of Soviet engineers and workmen helped the Republic organise its defence industry. The production of artillery and small arms and ammunition, repair of tanks and aircraft and the manufacture of armoured cars and even, on a small scale, fighter planes was organised in Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona, Sagunto, Murcia, Cartagena and Sabadell. The essential technical documentation was provided by the Soviet Union.

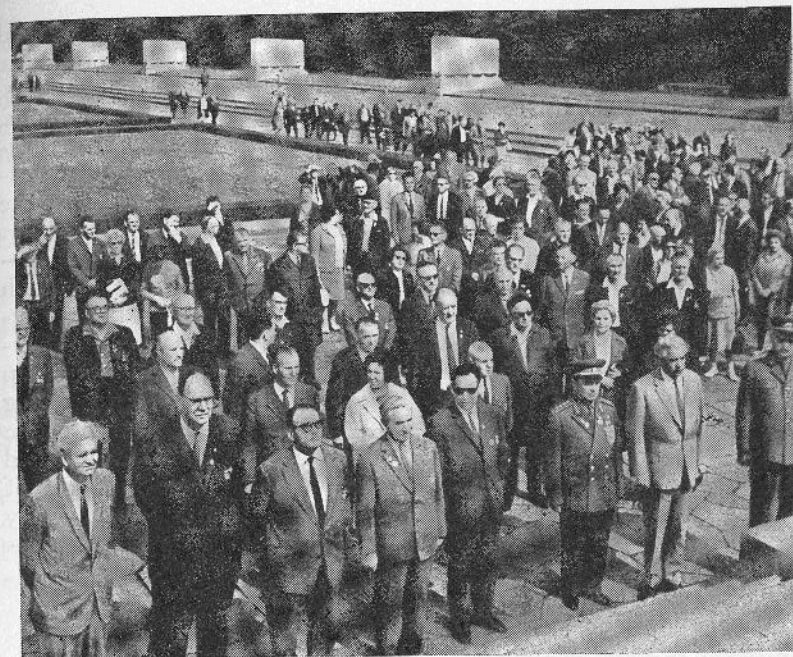
As the Spanish commanders and staffs accumulated organisational and operational experience, the Soviet Government gradually recalled the advisers and instructors.

Soviet airmen and other specialists left Spain in September-October 1938 after the Spanish Government's decision to recall foreign volunteers from the front. In February 1939, all that remained was a small group of thirty advisers and staff, which also left Spain after the capitulatory take-over by Colonel Casado. In all 157 Soviet volunteers laid down their lives in Spain. One-sixth of the Soviet airmen and tank men did not return to their native land.

Spanish patriots and democrats had this to say about the brave deeds of Soviet volunteers in the *History of the Communist Party of Spain*: "Of the extensive moral and material assistance which the land of socialism gave the Spanish people there stands out in particular, as an unfading and moving memory, the activity of the heroic Soviet volunteers who came to Spain to teach our soldiers and young commanders of the People's Army to use the latest military equipment and the art of modern warfare. Displaying courage and modesty, they showed how to fight in the air and in modern tanks, how to fight against the planes and tanks of the enemy. The Soviet volunteers won the right to a place of honour in the history of our war."<sup>1</sup>

In Western literature one finds fantastically exaggerated figures about Soviet participation in the military operations in Spain. In fact only a little more than 2,000 Soviet volunteers fought and worked in Spain on the side of the Republic throughout the whole war, including 772 airmen, 351 tank men, 222 army advisers and instructors, 77 naval specialists, 100 artillery specialists, 52 other

<sup>1</sup> *Historia del Partido Comunista de España* (abbreviated version), Paris, 1960, p. 134.



Veterans of the International Brigades from 22 countries and Spanish Communist Party representatives attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the Soviet war memorial in Berlin's Treptow Park Cemetery. July 1966

specialists, 130 aircraft factory workers and engineers, 156 radio operators and other signals men, and 204 interpreters.<sup>1</sup> What is more, there were never more than 600 to 800 present in Spain at one time.<sup>2</sup> So this is the truth behind the "Soviet intervention" and "Russian divisions" proclaimed by fascist propaganda, which served the hypocritical "appeasers" of fascism in Paris and London ruling circles as a pretext for equating the Soviet people's aid to the Spanish Republic with the massive invasion of Spain by hundreds of thousands of regular Italian and German troops in support of the insurgents.

The total extent of Soviet military supplies may be seen from the following figures: the Soviet Union sent to the Spanish Government 806 military aircraft, mainly fighters, 362 tanks, 120 armoured cars, 1,555 artillery pieces, about 500,000 rifles, 340 gre-

<sup>1</sup> *Modern and Current History*, 1971, No. 2, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> In the *History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945* (Moscow, 1960, p. 113) it is stated incorrectly that there were only 557 Soviet volunteers in Spain. In fact this figure relates to a specific moment (October 1937).



nade launchers, 15,113 machine-guns, more than 110,000 aerial bombs, about 3,400,000 rounds of ammunition, 500,000 grenades, 862 million cartridges, 1,500 tons of gunpowder, torpedo boats, air defence searchlight installations, motor vehicles, radio stations, torpedoes and fuel.<sup>1</sup> Not all these war materials reached their destination because, as had already been mentioned, some Soviet vessels and ships chartered from other countries were sunk by the Italians or forced into ports held by the insurgents.

Soviet military cargoes were delivered to Spain by two routes—by sea to Spanish Mediterranean ports and overland through France. Both routes were extremely unreliable. The French Government allowed military cargoes to cross its territory only at certain times and then not in their entirety. They used to be held up in France for months. In the period from autumn 1937 to spring 1938 the Pyrenean frontier was firmly closed to Soviet arms. The last large consignment of Soviet war material sent to France did not begin to cross the Franco-Spanish border until the end of January 1939, when a considerable part of Catalonia had already been captured by the fascists. By then there were no aerodromes where the planes could be assembled.

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The struggle against fascism in Spain was a struggle for peace. The defeat of the Spanish Republic, responsibility for which must be borne to a large extent by the “appeasers” of fascism in the governments of Paris, London and Washington, paved the way for war. No more than six months after the collapse of the Spanish Republic, fascist Germany unleashed a world war. Intoxicated by his easy victories over France and other European countries, Hitler treacherously invaded the USSR in 1941. The whole Soviet people arose under the leadership of the Communist Party to engage fascism in mortal combat.

From this moment onwards the hopes of the enslaved peoples of Europe rested on the outcome of the struggle in the East. “Each victory of the USSR over Hitler will also be our victory,” announced the Communist Party of France on June 22, 1941, the organiser of the Resistance movement in the country.<sup>2</sup> In Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary and other fascist-occupied countries the popular resistance, led by the Communists of these countries, received a new and mighty stimulus.

In the battles of Moscow, Stalingrad and Kursk, unprecedented in history for the number of troops and the amount of war material involved, the Soviet Armed Forces broke the back of the fas-

cist beast. “Out of fascist Germany’s 13,600,000 total casualties, it lost 10 million killed, wounded and captured on the Soviet-German front. Three-quarters of the total losses of the fascist aviation and more than half the artillery losses also fall to the Soviet-German front.”<sup>1</sup>

After expelling the enemy from the USSR Soviet troops fulfilled their internationalist duty by bringing liberation to the peoples of Eastern, Southeastern and Central Europe.

For the Soviet volunteers to Spain the Great Patriotic War was a continuation of the struggle against fascism begun on the soil and in the sky of Spain.

Whatever the post they held in this war: be it front commander or battalion commander, they all brought with them to the fields of battle against the nazi invaders experience accumulated in Spain, ardent patriotism, internationalism and hatred of fascism.

The Spain of 1936-1939 was a battlefield for advance guard combat between the forces of democracy and fascism. The great victory of the forces of the anti-Hitler coalition led by the Soviet Union was a fitting crown to the heroic struggle against the mortal enemy of all peoples—fascism.

<sup>1</sup> *Military History Journal*, No. 7, 1971, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Humanité*, June 22, 1941 (underground edition).

<sup>1</sup> *The Second World War*, Book 1, Moscow, 1966, p. 33 (in Russian).



## THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To write of the progressive Americans who gave their hearts to the cause of the Spanish Republic is our duty. To write of Spain and America in the years of the anti-fascist war means to open the window to the very eve of Apocalypse, to review the dynamic decade when the Spanish war awoke in America an anti-fascist conscience that would serve as a source of strength for the people over the difficult years of the Second World War.

The experience gained and the lessons learned in those years will be neither "exorcised" by the new inquisitors, nor obliterated by the remnants of cold war logic on the part of some American statesmen.

To write of Spain and America of the thirties is to cross a bridge to an almost forbidden past. For in America today, with rare exception, all meaningful factual data on the Spanish struggle has either been deleted from the curricula of schools and universities, or so distorted as to make the events connected with it appear to have constituted an ordinary "palace coup" against a "red" government.

This is not to imply that there have been no books written in America giving an honest account of the Spanish national-revolutionary war. Such books do exist, and they are being increasingly welcomed by the contemporary reader. For, despite the opposition of reactionary quarters, progressive America seeks desperately for solutions to its problems and turns more and more to the heritage of its past.

In the 1930s, America became an area of sharp confrontations between labour and capital. It was a time of widespread strikes, staged in response to the capitalists' attempts to find a way out of the ruinous crisis of 1929-32 by intensifying their exploitation of the working class. Action taken by workers and the jobless was frequently suppressed by force of arms. American soil was stained with the blood of working men.

The movement of the army of unemployed, which in the period from 1932 to 1936 remained at a level of 16,500,000 jobless, developed along a broad front of class battles.

Nor did agriculture escape the calamities engendered by the economic crisis. In a span of two years of the mid-thirties, more than 1,300,000 farms were seized from their owners and an additional 330,000 holdings put up for forced sale.

Capitalists in the United States, as in Europe, fought tooth and nail against the reforms that the world economic crisis had patently shown were imperative. The American counterparts of the Krupps and Thyssens, who had paved the way to dominance for German fascism, strove to turn back the clock of history. Various fascist-type organisations were established: The Black Legion, the Ku-Klux-Klan, the Coughlinites, the America First groupings, the Nazi Bund and various "vigilance corps" and "secret armies".

However, they found no mass base among the American public. The working class and democratic forces could not be intimidated and demoralised by the onslaught of big capital. On the contrary, the struggle against the consequences of the crisis strengthened the working class, and the labour movement rose from a membership of four million to a total of almost 15,000,000. The pressures of the union movement and of the unemployed councils were largely responsible for the enactment of the National Industrial Recovery Act (June 1933) and other reforms such as Social Security benefits and old-age pensions. In the process of the struggle, the industrial worker and the small farmer had become that singular force in American life that held back the dark forces of reaction.

It was in this social struggle, imbued with a militant spirit, that solidarity with the Spanish people was born in America.

The U.S. ruling circles had assumed a hostile attitude towards the National Front of the Spanish Republic even before the Spanish war began. Their class sympathies lay with the forces that had been rejected by the Spanish people in the parliamentary elections of February 1936, that is, with the bloc consisting of the financial oligarchy, the landowners and the church, all of whom drew support from the monarchist military clique. Therefore, when a conspiracy by these reactionary forces developed on July 18, 1936 into an armed fascist revolt against the legal democratic government, American capital rushed to the aid of the ringleaders of the revolt.

On August 11, 1936, just three weeks after the fascist rising against the Republic, the U.S. State Department announced a "moral" embargo against the shipping of arms to either side in the Spanish war, and on January 8, 1937, a joint resolution of Congress banning shipments of war materiel to Spain was enacted into law.

Thus, the Roosevelt Administration formally adhered to a policy of neutrality, while in fact creating conditions for rendering aid to the insurgents. It is known, for example, that Italy and Germany, General Franco's patrons, could not supply him with much oil. The American Texas Oil Company supplied this need: during the





One of American aid to Spain posters. 1938

three years of the war, more than 1,866,000 tons of fuel, including high-test aviation gasoline, were delivered to Franco, enough to take care of all exigencies. Moreover, the Spanish fascists received 12,000 trucks from the United States, more than twice the number they got from Germany and Italy. The Spanish Republic, on the other hand, could buy neither fuel nor trucks from the United States. What is more, the U.S. Government permitted arms and ammunition deliveries to Italy and Germany, who passed them on to Franco. Between January and April 1937, 60,000 airplane bombs were loaded on German freighters from just one plant, at Carneys Point, New Jersey.

When Barcelona and other cities in the Spanish Republic were brutally bombed in March 1938, President Roosevelt conceded that the fascist airplanes may have been dropping bombs of American

make on Barcelona, noting that they may have been sold to some European government and then reexported to Franco.<sup>1</sup>

The United States brought diplomatic pressure to bear on the government of Mexico in an attempt to force that nation to cease her support of the Spanish Republic. Despite the fact that the United States formally regarded the Republican Government the duly authorised government in Spain, the U.S. State Department established an American Consulate in Malaga in February 1937, after it was captured by the insurgents.

The bourgeois press fully reflected the pro-fascist stance of American finance capital and the government. From the very first days of the Spanish war newspapers and magazines with circulations in the millions (*Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Times*, *New York Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, and many others) spread the notion of Franco's "crusade" against the communist menace allegedly endangering Spain, and lauded the valour of the insurgents in Toledo's Alcazar—those "heroes" who used as a cover not only the thick walls of the fortress but also the wives and children of workers they had seized as hostages.

When the facts of fascist barbarism—the bombings of the peaceful population of cities, the mass executions and brutal treatment of the inhabitants of seized territories—became known, and as the direct intervention of Italian and German troops became evident, some newspapers and magazines altered their assessment of events and the manner in which they reported them. In particular, such influential magazines as *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Fortune* began to express open sympathy with the Republic.

The switch made by these organs of the press was prompted also by the pressure of public opinion. A Gallup Poll survey showed that 76 per cent of the American populace were in support of the Spanish Republic. The country's major political parties had to take this fact into account, not only in their election and other political activities, but sometimes also in the actions taken by government bodies. Unqualified support for the Spanish Republic came above all from the entire organised labour movement, as well as from the overwhelming majority of people in the arts and sciences and university students and faculties. A letter published in the *New York Times* on March 1, 1937, under the heading "Ninety-Eight Writers Score Spanish Rebels" was but one indication of the general pro-Republican sympathies of American intellectuals. Among the latter were some of the greatest names in American letters: Franklin Adams, Brooks Atkinson, Robert Benchley, Erskine Caldwell, John Dewey, Clifton Fadiman, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Sinclair Lewis, Lewis Mumford, Christopher Morley, Genevieve Taggard and Thornton Wilder.

<sup>1</sup> *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. 7, New York, 1969, p. 252, 286.



Appearing in the press at that time were many such letters, articles, resolutions and appeals signed by ordinary citizens and by outstanding figures in the arts and sciences. An important contribution to the creation of a favourable attitude towards the Spanish Republic was made by letters and articles written by distinguished journalists and writers George Seldes, Martha Gellhorn, Herbert Matthews, Joseph North, Ernest Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, and many others who exposed the nature of the fascist attack against the Republic, extolled the courage of the Spanish people and the People's Militia, and warned of the consequences if fascism were allowed to win in Spain.

There was no major union—steel, auto, rubber, oil—in any part of the United States which did not register in resolutions and in its press whole-hearted support for the Spanish Republic. Mass demonstrations, rallies and meetings were held throughout the land. At the end of 1936, at a meeting sponsored by the American Trade-Union Committee for Relief to Spain, at which 16,000 people gathered, the garment workers' union issued an appeal to send aid to the Republic. The garment workers collected 100,000 sets of clothing for the Spanish population. In the beginning of 1937, over \$1,500 was collected for the Aid to Spain Fund at just one meeting in Canton, Ohio. Similar meetings were held in many other cities.

When the International Federation of Trade Unions, at the request of the Mexican unions, held an Aid to Spain Week, the American Trade-Union Committee for Relief to Spain immediately dispatched \$100,000. According to the *New York Post*, in July 1937 an additional \$125,000 for assistance to Spanish trade unions was collected by this same organisation, and six major Republican organisations raised over \$800,000. (Because of the dollar's devaluation, equivalent sums today would show millions of dollars in place of the indicated hundreds of thousands.)

In the third year of the war, when the predatory intentions of German and Italian fascism became evident to the whole world, the U.S. Government's continued policy of non-resistance to the fascist intervention in Spain evoked a new wave of indignation among the American people. In September 1938, 70,000 people marched in the streets of New York demanding that the arms embargo be lifted. An especially vigorous campaign was conducted in November 1938 to send the freighter *Erik-Maria* to Spain with a cargo of grain, foodstuffs, clothing and medical supplies valued at \$300,000. American and Canadian farmers contributed 2,000 tons of grain. More than 100 sports and trade-union organisations in New York and other cities held benefit matches under the slogan "Match for Spain".

Paradoxically, despite the all-out support of the moneyed interests of the ultra Right, their attempts at popular fund raising



A meeting of solidarity with the Spanish people in Columbus Circle in New York. 1936

for aid to the Spanish rebels met with little success. A major fascist front organisation calling itself the American Committee for Spanish Relief set as its goal the raising of \$500,000. Its campaign, culminating in a meeting at Madison Square Garden in New York City, failed miserably. Less than half the seats in the auditorium were sold. Having collected a total of just \$17,562



(including the Garden meeting receipts), this "Committee" closed its offices and withdrew from all public activity.

Despite the many and unequivocal manifestations of the American people's will to aid the Spanish Republic, those who held the levers of power supported the enemies of the Republic. The sympathies of the majority of the American people were bluntly ignored. The aid given to fascist Spain by American finance capital proved as decisive in the long run as the military intervention of Germany and Italy.

The highest form of progressive America's international solidarity was the participation of American volunteers in the Spanish war on the side of the Republic.

There were over 3,000 of these volunteers of the International Abraham Lincoln Brigade fighting in the ranks of the Republican Army. But millions of American men and women supported them, followed their fate with unremitting attention, manifested concern for them, and defended them against attacks by American reaction. The Lincoln Brigade volunteers were a banner, an inspiration to all in the movement for solidarity with Republican Spain. The appearance of the American unit on the fronts of the Spanish war gave rise to a national organisation called The Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Its purpose, according to one of its founders, Philip Bard, was "to reach into every American group and every American home, into trade unions, clubs and church organisations..., to organise collections of 100,000 packs of cigarettes each month—and chocolate and books and money with which to buy other necessities".<sup>1</sup>

The "Friends" list of sponsors read like an honour roll. The California headquarters, for example, listed among its sponsors such men as State Assemblyman, Ellis Patterson; Los Angeles Supervisor, John Anson Ford; the distinguished writer, Upton Sinclair; attorney Leo Gallagher, and the eminent actor, James Cagney.

Across the years, the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade succeeded in doing exactly what it set out to do. It enrolled more than 25,000 members in tens of chapters across the country and collected approximately \$215,500 for the purpose of purchasing parcels for the volunteers.

Simultaneously with the departure of American volunteer fighters, an American volunteer medical contingent was formed. In October 1936, a group of prominent medical and professional men had created the first nucleus of the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. Among those participating were Henry Pratt Fairchild, Professor Paul Douglas, Professor Albert Einstein, Dr Walter B. Cannon of the Harvard School of Medicine,

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Worker*, New York, June 7, 1937.



American medical volunteers. Second at right: Dr. Barsky

Dr James B. Peters of the Yale School of Medicine, Dr Thomas Addis of the California School of Medicine, and a host of others representing every university medical college in the United States. Besides giving medical aid, the organisation also provided food and clothing for the Spanish people.

In January 1937, the Bureau formed the first medical contingent headed by Dr Edward Barsky. It included many doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, a pharmacist and an interpreter. The unit sailed from New York on the *Paris*, taking with it sufficient supplies to equip a fifty-bed hospital, plus the first ambulances and quantities of medicine donated by the American people. American medical personnel served two years in the Spanish war; a total of more than 117 doctors and nurses gave unstintingly of their time, their skill—and in some cases, their lives.

American hospitals were set up at Romeral, Tarancon and Castillejo, on the Madrid Front, and at Vich, Mataro and S'Agaro, in Catalonia. American doctors and nurses also served in the various International Brigade hospitals in Albacete, Murcia, Denia, Benicasim and elsewhere.



American mobile units, replete with ambulances, tents and mobile operating rooms, under the leadership of Dr Irving Busch, Dr A. I. Friedman, Dr Leo Eloesser and Dr Edward K. Barsky, served on almost every active front in Spain, where they were constantly bombed, shelled and, in many cases, strafed. In March and April 1938—the period of heroic fighting and the retreat of the Republican Army—Dr Barsky was given command of all International Brigade hospitals in Spain, and he supervised the withdrawal of all international medical personnel and wounded from Central Spain to Catalonia.

Countless thousands of wounded, not only from the International Brigades, but from all Republican units, were cared for by these most capable, dedicated and courageous American medical volunteers.

The American Medical Bureau and other organisations devoted to the cause of democracy continued to solicit funds for the Spanish Republic throughout the war.

The first newspaper account of the participation of an American unit in the battle of the Jarama in February 1937 came as a surprise to many Americans and caused a sensation. Under the circumstances of official U.S. hostility towards Spanish democracy, the volunteer movement was unable to assume as massive and open a character as other manifestations of solidarity. The initiative and organising role in this endeavour belonged to the Communist Party. The American Communists were among the first to fully recognise the danger for the world of the fascist revolt in Spain, and were prepared to come to the aid of the Spanish people in more ways than issuing declarations and soliciting funds. Many of the first American volunteers to fight in the International Brigades were members of the Communist Party, members of the Young Communist League and trade-union activists tempered in the class battles of the thirties. These were the Americans who fought the nazi Bundists in the streets of American cities and ringed the consulates of Hitler Germany with militant picket lines. When the *Bremen*, pride of the nazi merchant fleet, sailed into New York, these were the Americans who boarded her and climbed the mast to tear down the swastika. And the young American seaman who tossed the symbol of nazi rule into the Hudson River was later a machine gunner in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Many of these Americans were ready to give up their lives in the struggle they felt was their own.

Anti-fascists from all over the land responded to the Communist Party's call. They volunteered to fight in a just war for freedom and democracy, motivated by the high principles of international proletarian solidarity and by the ideals of the real free America, whose shots at the Concord Bridge in 1775 had "rattled the thrones of privilege and kings".



A group of American volunteers, Paul Robeson among them. Tarasona, August 1937

The first contingent of 97 volunteers sailed from New York on December 26, 1936. No one saw them off; they avoided publicity. Even the American press knew nothing about it. On board the ship, the volunteers kept away from each other to give no hint that they were a group. Some were very young, others, in their middle years. Among them were workers, professional men, students, and teachers; some were Americans whose ancestors had fought in the American revolution of 1776, and others were immigrants born in Europe or Latin America. A few days after they sailed, the Congress passed a law prohibiting American citizens from joining the Spanish Army. Nonetheless, in the ensuing months volunteers, taking the necessary precautionary measures, continued to go to Spain, in groups and individually. They would sail for Europe and then cross France to reach the Spanish border. It was not always easy to get past the coastal control system established by the Non-Intervention Committee. In March 1937, for example, 17 Americans and 8 Canadians—led by Joseph Dallet, the future commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion—were detained in a small fishing boat in the Mediterranean by French police and imprisoned. After serving their time, they made their way to Spain anyway, by land. Joseph Dallet was killed in the autumn of 1937 leading his battalion into attack at Fuentes del Ebro.



The Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the 15th International Brigade was formed in January-February 1937. This battalion, which included besides Americans volunteers of other nationalities, was to fight through seven of the major battles of the Spanish war.

Its first engagement was on the Jarama Front, where in a bloody battle the Republican Army stopped an offensive by General Franco's crack troops and frustrated a plan to encircle Madrid. Under the command of Captain Robert Merriman, the battalion took part in the Republican counter-offensive and lost three-quarters of its personnel: 127 dead and over 200 wounded. Among the dead were such gallant commanders as Douglas Seacord, John Scott, William Henry, and the Irish company adjutant, Eamon McGrotty.

Two American battalions fought at Brunete: the George Washington Battalion and the Lincoln Battalion. They participated in the storming of Villanueva de la Cañada, and Mosquito Crest, in the defence of Villanueva del Pardillo, and in the withdrawal from Brunete across the Guadarrama. By the tenth day of battle, their losses were such that they had been reduced to one battalion. By the end of the campaign, July 28, 1937, there were only 250 survivors and the two battalions had to be merged into one. The list of dead was long. It included Oliver Low, commander of the Lincoln Battalion and the first American Negro to lead an American integrated military unit into battle; the Washington company commissars Harry Hynes and Morris Wickman, plus tens of others.

The following brief entry in the diary of one of the fighters characterises the morale of the American volunteers during the trying days at Brunete: "July 21:—Quiet—but snipers hiding in the bushes and trees continually are getting some. I lost my best friend today. Sydney Graham of New York was killed by a sniper's bullet. We buried him in the valley with these words over his tombstone: 'He Died That Spanish Democracy May Live'."

A month later, the 15th International Brigade participated in the Republican offensive in Aragon. It fought its way into Quinto, stormed the heights of Purburell Hill, and, finally, together with the 32nd Spanish Brigade, stormed the fortress of Belchite and seized the town after bloody house-by-house and block-by-block fighting. Almost every member of the brigade staff was there in the thick of battle: the American Brigade Commissar, Steve Nelson, the American Chief of Staff, Robert Merriman, and American Staff Captains Bradley and Philip Detoro.

During the winter months of 1937-38, the 15th (Lincoln)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> People in the United States usually called the 15th Brigade as a whole the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In so doing, they referred not only to the Brigade itself, but to all the Americans fighting in the ranks of the Republican

Brigade, the 11th Brigade and units of the Republican Army fought in the bloody defensive battles in the critical Teruel sector—La Muela, El Muletón, Santa Barbara and the valley of the Alfambra.

Shortly after the battles in the Teruel sector, the 15th Brigade was again in the forefront of the struggle in the offensive at Segura de los Baños. As a result of this campaign an enemy company was captured, together with its captain. On the following day, the brigade inflicted heavy losses on counter-attacking Foreign Legion "banderas". The Lincolnites earned the plaudits of Juan Modesto, the commander of the 5th Army Corps.

On March 9, 1938, at the time of the fascist breakthrough, the Lincolns were again at the apex of the most critical sector of the front. The story of their fighting retreat from Belchite to Caspe is one of utmost courage and sacrifice. Their stand at Caspe permitted the first momentary stabilisation of the secondary lines, and enabled other sections of the army to prepare for continued battle.

Then, together with the 12th and 13th International Brigades who had joined them from the Central Front, the Lincolns continued the rearguard action. Until the end of March they retreated under the onslaught of the much superior strength of the enemy forces, frequently finding themselves surrounded and communications with the staff and between battalions cut.

Losses in killed, wounded and captured were especially heavy in the defence of the Calaceite-Batea arc above Gandesa, where the Lincolns, together with the 11th Brigade and the entire 5th Corps were again cut off and surrounded. But the fighting spirit of the volunteers never waned. The 15th and the other International Brigades crossed the Ebro to regroup and prepare for new battles.

The reverses suffered by the Republican Army in the Teruel sector and on the Eastern Front in the beginning of 1938, which were coincident with the seizure of Austria by German troops, gave rise to a new wave of concern in the American body-politic. On February 2, Associated Press dispatches announced: "Sixty American Senators and Congressmen send greetings to the Opening Session of Spanish Cortes in Catalonia. . . . Express confidence in the true democracy of the Spanish Republic."<sup>1</sup> Henry L. Stimson, former Secretary of State, pleaded openly against the arms embargo, stating that: "If this Loyalist Government is overthrown, it is evident now that its defeat will be solely due to the fact that it has been deprived of its rights to buy from us and from other friendly nations the munitions necessary for its defense."<sup>2</sup>

Army. This explains why in the present article both terms—Lincoln Battalion and Lincoln Brigade are used.

<sup>1</sup> *A. P. Dispatch*, February 2, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, January 23, 1938.





Crossing of the Ebro by American volunteers from the 15th International Brigade. July 1938

Across the country a chorus of millions of voices demanded that the arms embargo be lifted. Unions, Democratic Clubs, Masonic Lodges, Churches—all asked that U.S. policy be reversed and that the Spanish Republic be given arms for its defence. The well-known columnist, Drew Pearson, wrote: "Washington has seen all kinds of lobbying . . . but seldom before has [it] seen people spend money to come from all over the country in a cause from which they would receive no material benefit."<sup>1</sup>

Senators Nye, Borah, Clark, Thomas and King of the State of Utah—all among the chief authors of the Neutrality Act—now publicly regretted their action. On May 2, Senator Nye introduced a resolution to rescind the embargo (imposed on January 8, 1937) and permit the shipment of arms to Republican Spain. Many in the House and Senate instituted a campaign in support of the resolution. However, under pressure from the Administration, the Foreign Relations Committee rejected Nye's resolution.

In July 1938, the American volunteers participated in the fierce and bloody battle of the Ebro. At Asco, Fatarella, Gandesa and in the defence of Hill 666 in the Pandols, they were again cited by the Army Command. At Sierra Caballs and in their last action on the Ebro Front, the Americans were at all times an example of courage, dedication and sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, New York, 1961, p. 536.

During two years of battle the Abraham Lincoln Battalion had been led successively by 13 commanding officers. Seven were killed, and the remainder, excepting the last commander, Major Milton Wolff, were wounded, in most cases more than once. Casualties were just as heavy among American commissars of all ranks and company and section commanders, as well as among the men themselves. The American volunteers had done everything within their power. All of them had combined to write a truly glorious page in the history of the Spanish war and in the history of the American people's struggle against fascism.

Some names are forever associated in the minds of the American survivors with the campaigns in which they fought. They will never forget the steadfastness of the commissar, Steve Nelson, at Jarama and Brunete; or the courage and skill of Captains Leonard Lamb, Hans Amlic and Carl Bradley at Quinto and Belchite. The splendid leadership of the commissars Joseph Dallet, Saul Wellman, Carl Geiser and Fred Keller at Fuentes del Ebro, Teruel and Segura de los Baños, was unsurpassed. And the figure of the 15th Brigade Commissar, Dave Doran, at Caspe, essentially epitomised the total concept of the American Volunteer. "At Caspe," as one man put it, "Dave Doran was the rallying point, the nerve centre to which all impulses return. . . . No matter who breaks, Doran can be depended upon to withdraw no further than he must."<sup>1</sup> And the consummate skill and courage of Battalion Commander Major Wolff, who, like many Americans had fought through every campaign beginning with Brunete, and is ever associated with the battle of the Ebro.

When by a decree of the Spanish Republican Government the International Brigades were withdrawn from all action, steps were taken to repatriate them to their homelands. Before leaving Spain, the members of the Lincoln Battalion and the entire 15th Brigade pledged to continue aid to the Spanish people in their struggle against fascism. Indeed, former Lincoln brigaders addressed gatherings across the land and appeared in hundreds of union halls before tens of thousands of workers, pointing out the urgent need for unity in the struggle against fascism.

The efforts of the veterans of the Spanish war were fruitful. Before long, a Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Relief Committee was established and had as its National Chairman Dr Edward Barsky. This organisation was to function over a period of many years, making collections in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Tens of thousands of Spaniards were thus aided with food, clothing and medicine in the French camps at Argeles-sur-Mer, Prats de Mollo and others. Other Spaniards, those who reached the safety of

<sup>1</sup> Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, New York, 1967, pp. 428-29.



Mexico, Cuba and South America, were also aided by the American people and especially by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. With funds contributed by the American people, the organisation established a fully-equipped hospital in Mexico City for the Spanish Republican refugees. Staffed by exiled Spanish medical personnel, it was named after Dr Barsky.

The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were also in the forefront in organising aid to the Spaniards imprisoned by Franco. The American Committee for Spanish Freedom worked for a number of years to achieve the release of those imprisoned. Later, the Action Committee to Free Spain played a similar role. Both organisations involved unions, varied political organisations, church groups and community groups.

On the eve of the Second World War, a series of paradoxes affecting Lincoln men became apparent. Though the American people accepted the brigaders wholly and completely their government was even then preparing the first inquisition before the House Un-American Activities Committee. And though the fighting experience of the Lincoln Vets was being carefully studied by the U.S. military, Lincoln volunteers for the armed services found themselves listed as "premature anti-fascists" and subjected to secret orders holding them to the continental United States. Only after a stiff fight mounted by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for the right to continue their fight against fascism were the restrictions finally lifted and the Lincoln brigaders permitted to fight in the ranks of the American army. An additional 400 men of the original Abraham Lincoln Brigade were casualties of the Second World War.

According to the *Volunteer for Liberty*, more than "six hundred American veterans of the war in Spain were enrolled in the American Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. Three hundred more served in the Merchant Marine." Their cadres contributed between 60 and 70 commissioned officers. Among these were such men as Captain Herman Bottcher, who received a field commission plus the Distinguished Service Cross with Oak-Leaf Cluster. Robert Thompson was another winner of the DSC. He served as a sergeant in New Guinea. In Spain, he commanded the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

Lieutenant Harry Schonberg and Lawrence Cane, battalion adjutant and last M.G. company commander, respectively, of the same Canadian Battalion, were outstanding in the Second World War. Schonberg was a captain in one of the shock battalions in Italy, and Cane was a captain of Combat Engineers on Omaha Beach. Kenneth Shaker, a platoon commander in the M. G. company of the Lincoln Battalion, attained the U.S. army rank of captain and commanded a company of the famed 509th Parachute Battalion, attached to the 82nd Division, which took part in the

Normandie landing to open a second front in Europe in 1944 and saw service at Anzio (Italy) and Southern France.

A number of Lincoln brigaders were attached to the Office of Strategic Services and served with valour behind the enemy lines in North Africa, Italy, France and Yugoslavia. Some of them, too, had distinguished themselves in the Spanish war. Captain Irving Goff had led a guerrilla detachment to free 300 Republican prisoners behind the fascist lines in Spain. Lieutenants William Aalto, Michael Jimenez, Irving Fajans and Milton Wolff, the last Lincoln Battalion commander, had made exceptional contributions to the Spanish struggle.

In addition to the struggle for the right to fight fascism at the fronts, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were in the forefront of the home battle demanding the early opening of a second front in Europe. They saw speedy victory over Hitler and Mussolini as presaging the end of Franco's rule and the liberation of the Spanish people.

Continuing its struggle against the Franco dictatorship during the war, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were instrumental in exposing the scandalous activities of some American oil interests who were selling petroleum to the Franco government which then shipped it to Nazi Germany.

In the post-war period, arrests, jailings and persecutions of every kind followed in the wake of McCarthyist hysteria. Every effort was made to discredit, obfuscate, and eradicate all that had been created in the progressive struggles of the thirties and throughout the length of the great anti-fascist war. But those who had aided Spain held their heads high and fought back. The volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade remained true to their pledge



Veterans of the Lincoln Battalion at a demonstration in New York, 1938



to the Spanish people. Throughout this period they were in the forefront of the struggle to exclude the Franco government from membership in the United Nations. They campaigned against the U.S. State Department's two-faced policy of publicly criticising Franco, yet secretly working to strengthen the regime. This principled position against a policy that could only lead, as it did in 1953, to a Washington-Madrid Pact aroused the full wrath of the U.S. Government.

The overwhelming majority of Lincoln Veterans, in this last period, had no formal Communist affiliation. But they offered principled opposition to the Hitler tactic of anti-communism used by the United States Government in pursuit of the cold war.

And wherever the Government of the United States has supported, aided or abetted the imposition or maintenance of a fascist or military dictatorship upon a people in any part of the world, the men of the Lincoln Brigade have generally denounced the act. It is not surprising that the American internationalists have been subjected to the fascist tactic of the McCarran Act and to the inquisition of the United States Subversive Activities Control Board. Over the years lives have been ruined, careers shattered, and whole areas of employment denied them.

Despite this harassment, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade carried on their anti-fascist activities. They worked for the liberation of Leoncia Peña and other political prisoners in Franco jails. In addition to publicising the plight of these prisoners and mobilising American support for their release, they raised the demand for full amnesty for all political prisoners. Typical of the many demonstrations and picket lines organised by the Lincoln brigaders was their militant action at the New York World Fair in 1964, which received considerable attention in the U.S. press and helped to make many thousands of Americans aware of the nature of the Franco dictatorship. Another powerful action was the protest demonstration which greeted the arrival in New York of a Franco government naval training vessel carrying young Spanish cadets.

The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade also played a role in rallying Americans to join the international protests against the execution of Julian Grimau. All these activities continued despite government harassment of the veterans. Finally, in 1965, the Supreme Court of the United States had no alternative but to reject the petition against the VALB by the U.S. Attorney General's Office, "for lack of meaningful evidence".

After ten years of battle and twenty years of constant harassment, the Lincoln Brigaders had won! It is notable that those thousands of Americans who supported them in their just fight were the same who had fought on the home front for the cause of the Spanish Republic. For them, the struggle for the freedom of Spain was also a struggle for the freedom of America.

## YUGOSLAVIA

The history of the liberation struggle of the working people of Yugoslavia under the leadership of the League of Communists abounds in examples of the Yugoslav freedom fighters' solidarity with progressive and revolutionary movements in other countries. Thousands of Yugoslavs took part in the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, among them such celebrated generals as Aleksa Dundić, Danilo Srdić, and others. In Yugoslavia itself mass solidarity movements arose repeatedly: in defence of the young Soviet Republic against the imperialist intervention, in support of the Hungarian revolution and the revolutionary struggle in Bulgaria, in defence of Dimitrov during the Leipzig trial, for saving the life of Thaelmann and other victims of nazism. In the thirties, very important was the movement of assistance to the Spanish people who fought courageously in 1936-1939 against Spanish and foreign fascists.

The participation of Yugoslav anti-fascists, many of them Communists, in the Spanish national-revolutionary war was a milestone event in the History of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and in the struggle of all its peoples against fascism. Since the early days of the Spanish war the LCY explained to the masses that German nazism and Italian fascism were the masterminds of and accomplices in the fascist revolt in Spain, which was part of the imperialist conspiracy against the progressive forces of the world.

In July-August 1936, *Proleter*, organ of the LCY Central Committee, appealed to the working class, the peasantry, all friends of peace and all progressive people to raise their voice in protest against the aggression of world fascism assisting the Spanish insurgents. The LCY stressed that a defeat of the Popular Front in Spain would deal a heavy blow to the cause of peace and freedom not only in Spain but also in the rest of the world. "The Spanish people's struggle is our own struggle," *Proleter* wrote in August 1936. "This is the people's struggle for the right to shape their own destiny, a struggle for freedom, decent life and peace, a





A group of Yugoslav volunteers in a Benicasim hospital

struggle against fascism and war. Let us give it our quick and wholehearted support with the same inspiration as Spanish fighters show when they give their lives for the cause of democracy and freedom."

The working class and all progressive people in Yugoslavia followed with admiration the heroic struggle of the Spanish people against the fascist insurgents.

The large-scale campaign for support to the embattled Spanish people was led by the Secretary of the LCY Central Committee, Josip Broz Tito. It was directed to organisational, ideological and political cohesion and consolidation of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the struggle against the fascist aggression and mobilisation of all progressive forces for the struggle against fascism.

The Communists explained to the peoples of Yugoslavia that fascism threatened them with slavery, plunder and even physical extermination. Therefore, the League's first priority task was to organise a mass movement against the reactionary forces in Yugoslavia which increasingly gravitated to Hitler nazism and Italian fascism. Huge demonstrations held at the time in many towns of Yugoslavia evidenced the widening influence of the League of Communists. The democratic and anti-fascist movement led by the Communists became a powerful factor in the country's political life.

The LCY exposed false declarations by the pro-fascist royal government of Yugoslavia of its alleged neutrality in the Spanish

war as camouflage to cover up its complicity in the actions of the Spanish insurgents. This complicity was manifested daily by the actions of the police and censorship against any expression of solidarity with Republican Spain and by their complete tolerance of statements in support of the reactionary and fascist forces in Spain.

The Yugoslav Government persecuted its subjects who expressed their solidarity with the Spanish people. The Minister of the Interior issued an order banning any activity in favour of the Spanish Republic and proclaiming that persons who enlisted in the Spanish Republican Army would be deprived of Yugoslav citizenship.

No reprisals, however, could prevent progressive people of Yugoslavia, particularly Communists, from fulfilling their duty of international solidarity.

The League of Communists of Yugoslavia, jointly with other progressive forces of the country, organised and inspired numerous and varied acts of solidarity with the Spanish people's struggle: the raising of funds, collection of foodstuffs, medicines, clothes and other goods needed by the population and servicemen of the Republican Army; printed publications and public speeches in defence of the Spanish Republic and the people of Spain against slander by reactionary, clerical and police agents provocateurs; selection and transport of volunteers to the Spanish Republican Army.

During the war, more than 1,600 Yugoslav volunteers went to Spain mostly from Yugoslavia, and also from France, Belgium, the USSR, Canada, Czechoslovakia, the U.S.A., Argentina and other countries where they had gone in search of work or as political emigrants. Ten Yugoslav immigrants living in Spain immediately joined in the armed struggle of the Spanish workers and peasants.

By no means all Yugoslavs who went to the aid of the Spanish people reached their destination. Many were arrested by police, detained in prisons and concentration camps in Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

The Yugoslav volunteers included representatives of all the peoples of Yugoslavia: Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians; more than 600 of them were Communists, including prominent leaders of the LCY.

Most volunteers were workers of various trades and peasants. There were many intellectuals, too: 15 doctors, 17 engineers, 11 teachers, 10 journalists, army officers, lawyers, actors, artists, office employees. Among the volunteers from Yugoslavia were also women doctors, medical nurses, workers and students. Spain was visited by well-known Yugoslav cultural and art personalities, in particular the Communist author August Cesarec and the Com-





Vladimir Čopić, commander of the 15th International Brigade (right) and Blagoj Parović, commissar of the 13th International Brigade

munist painter Djordje Andrejević (Kun). Special note is deserved by the student members of the International Brigades and their vigorous activities in the campaign of assistance to the Spanish people. Commenting on this fact, the bulletin of the Spanish students' organisation wrote in its February 1, 1938 issue that Yugoslavia was a beautiful country. Oppressed by a cruel tyranny it had made, along with the other Balcan countries, a great contribution to the defence of the Spanish people. The fields of the Jarama, Villanueva de la Cañada, Belchite keep memories of the heroic exploits of the Dimitrov and Djuro Djaković battalions, the Matija Gubec Company. Yugoslav students were to be found in other army units, serving as commissars, commanders, pilots and tankmen.

The young Communist students Milun Božović, Mojsije Stefanović, Djordje Kovačević, Bastijančić, Turk and many others gave their lives for the cause of the Spanish people.

Yugoslav volunteers served in all the International Brigades. Their largest body was in the 129th International Brigade (in the Dimitrov, Djaković and Masaryk battalions) and in the Divisionario Battalion of the 45th Division. Others served with the Liebknecht, Stjepan Radić, Kolarov, Rosa Luxemburg, Gottwald artillery batteries and other units. Yugoslavs also fought in the ranks of the 14th Guerrilla Corps. They could be met with in the Air Force, the Navy and in the medical corps. Army units containing Yugoslav volunteers fought at almost every front in Spain from the defence of Madrid in November 1936 to the last rear-

guard battles in the spurs of the Pyrenees early in February 1939. Everywhere, Yugoslav volunteers displayed courage and valour, for which many were decorated by the Spanish Republican Government. Yugoslav volunteers also served as commanding officers: 2 lieutenant-colonels, 8 majors, 35 captains, 105 lieutenants, 39 company and battery commissars, 7 battalion commissars, 1 brigade commissar. Vladimir Čopić, an outstanding leader of the LCY, was commander of the 15th International Brigade. The prominent leaders of the Yugoslav working-class movement, Božidar Maslarić and Marko Orešković also held commanding posts.

More than half of the Yugoslav volunteers were killed in action in Republican Spain, among them Blagoje Parović, member of the LCY Central Committee, commissar of the 13th International Brigade, who fell in the battle of Villanueva de la Cañada on July 6, 1937, and Djordje Kovačević, commissar of the Djaković Battalion, former secretary of the League of Communists Committee at Belgrade University. The commander of the Djaković Battalion, Aleksa Demnievski (Bauman), and a leader of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia, Veljko Vlahović, were severely wounded.

Early in the war, Yugoslav volunteers were scattered between different units of the International Brigades. As their numbers grew, however, the Balcan Company of the Dabrowski Battalion was formed into the Djuro Djaković Battalion, named after the secretary of the LCY Central Committee brutally murdered by gendarmes on April 29, 1929, in which most of the officers and men were Yugoslavs. The battalion also included Spaniards, Bulgarians, Rumanians, Greeks, Turks, Albanians, Frenchmen, Latvians, etc. In July 1937, the battalion took part in the battle of Brunete as an independent unit of the 45th Division. Taking part in the Brunete operations was also anti-tank battery consisting of Yugoslavs under Mirko Kovačević, a Communist student from Montenegro. The battery commissar was also a Communist student, Branko Krsmanović, from Serbia. Both died as heroes in 1941, fighting against the fascist invaders in the ranks of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia. In 1945, Branko Krsmanović was awarded the title of People's Hero of Yugoslavia posthumously.

After the fighting at Brunete, the Djuro Djaković Battalion was transferred to the Aragon Front late in August, where it lost more than half of its men when breaking through enemy fortifications and defending captured positions.

In the autumn of 1937, after its reinforcement with new volunteers the Djuro Djaković Battalion was added to the reserve group of the 45th Division, which also contained the Georgy Dimitrov Battalion. In February 1938 in Chillon (the Estremadura front) the group was reformed into the 129th International Brigade, which contained, in addition to the above battalions, the T. Masaryk Bat-





Yugoslav volunteers at the Aragon Front

talion, the Yugoslav anti-tank battery, a mortar company and a cavalry squadron. At the end of March 1938, the 129th International Brigade was moved to the Teruel sector and took part in defensive action against fascist units pushing towards the Mediterranean coast. In these battles, the brigade suffered heavy casualties, particularly in the Monroi-Morella area on a route where the 3rd company of the Djuro Djaković Battalion was almost completely wiped out and where Mojsije Stefanović, Vlado Brkić and many other Yugoslav volunteers were killed.

After these operations, the 129th Brigade continued to fight at the Levante Front, but a batch of its men who had retreated to Catalonia took part in the fighting on the Ebro in the ranks of a separate battalion of the 45th Division. After the internationalist volunteers had been recalled from the fronts by a decision of the Spanish Government, most of the Yugoslav servicemen had to stay in Spain for a while as they could not return to their homeland. In January 1939, they again went into battle jointly with international brigade volunteers of other nationalities to check the advance of fascist troops on Catalonia. Together with the Republican Army they retreated to the French border and were interned in French camps, where some 500 of them languished for more than two years.

The League of Communists organised in Yugoslavia the collection and delivery of funds and provisions to aid the Yugoslav vo-

lunteers interned in French camps and prisoners of war detained in Franco concentration camps and gaols. Simultaneously, the party launched a broad campaign for the repatriation of Yugoslav volunteers from foreign camps. "The struggle for the return of our volunteers," *Proleter* wrote, "is a component part of the people's struggle for democracy and for preserving our country's independence.... We demand that the government take urgent measures to repatriate all of our surviving volunteers."

The Communists' demand was supported by the popular masses. Conferences and meetings of protest were held throughout the country. More than 300,000 people signed an appeal to the government, demanding the repatriation of volunteers. The government demanded in turn that the volunteers sign a "statement of repentance" as the pre-condition for a permit to return to their homeland. This demand was naturally rejected, and the struggle went on. Immediately after the end of the Spanish war, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia helped about 50 veterans of the International Brigades to come to Yugoslavia for revolutionary work and to other countries for work among Yugoslav emigres residing there.

In 1941, the LCY secretly transferred to Yugoslavia another 250 volunteers, who immediately joined the national liberation movement. They travelled from France across Germany to the Yugoslav-Austrian border and further to Zagreb's underground station for assembly and transfer of volunteers to the People's Liberation Army and guerrilla units.

The experience Yugoslav anti-fascists gained in the national-revolutionary war in Spain helped them a great deal in their homeland.

Of those who had secretly returned to Yugoslavia, more than 150 died in the national liberation war of 1941-45. Many of them were organisers of uprisings, commanders of guerrilla and army units: Marko Orešković, Majdan Krajačić, Mirko Kovačević, Branko Krsmanović, Ilija Engel, Ratko Pavlović, Fadil Jakić, Milan Blagojević, Danko Mitrov, Ahmet Fetahagić, Robert Domani, Žikica Jovanović, Franjo Ogulinac, Henrik Žnidaršić, Miljenko Cvitković, Božo Dakić, Većeslav Cvetko. The Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army and of the guerrilla units of Croatia was Ivan Gošnjak, an ex-captain of the Spanish Republican Army, now General of the Army in Yugoslavia. The General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of Slovenia was also headed by an international brigade veteran, Franc Rozman, People's Hero of Yugoslavia, who was killed in the war. The commanders of all the four armies of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia were veterans of the Spanish war. Other veterans became commanders and political commissars of divisions and corps, among them People's Heroes of Yugoslavia Koča Popo-





Volunteers of the Dimitrov Subunit in trench lines (in centre: subunit commander Matija Vidaković)

vić, Kosta Nadj, Vlado Popović, Peko Dapčević, Ivan Rukavina, Danilo Lekić, Dušan Kveder, Veljko Kovačević, Srećko Manola, Vlado Četković, Vojo Todorović, Otmar Kreačić, Vizko Antić. High military and political posts were held by other ex-volunteers in the Spanish war: Karlo Mrazović, Ivan Krajačić, Gojko Nikoliš, Ivan Hariš, Maks Baće, Stane Bobnar, Stanko Semić, Grga Jankez, Cedo Kapor, Djuro Mešterović, Jolisiye Popovski, Isidor Strok, Ivan Vejvoda, Cvetko Uzunovski, Ratko Vujović, Jože Gregorčič.

During and shortly after the end of the national liberation war in Yugoslavia, many veterans of the International Brigades were promoted to senior ranks of officers and generals.

For their outstanding exploits in the war against the nazi and Italian fascist invaders more than 50 veterans of the Spanish war were awarded the title of People's Hero of Yugoslavia, and all the others received high government decorations.

Many of the Yugoslav volunteers who were unable to return to Yugoslavia joined the Resistance movements in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Poland, served with the fighting forces of the Soviet Union, Britain, the United States and other allied countries. The metal worker Koturović (Cot) of Belgrade became a hero of the French Resistance. Among its outstanding figures

were the Yugoslavs Ljubo Ilić, Vljako Begović, and Lazar Latinić.

Graves of Yugoslav Communists and anti-fascists, veterans of the Spanish Republican Army, who fought selflessly and died in the struggle for the freedom of other countries during World War II are scattered throughout Europe—from Madrid to Russian forests. This is a vivid expression of the Yugoslav people's devotion to international solidarity.

Slightly over 300 veterans of the International Brigades are still alive; the people affectionately call them "our Spaniards".

Many of them have held or still hold key political and public appointments in Yugoslavia, are members of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and republican central committees.

Veljko Vlahović, Ivan Gošnjak, Vlado Popović, Koča Popović are members of the Executive Committee Presidium of the LCY Central Committee and the Federal Council. Aleš Bebler, Vljako Begović, Peko Dapčević, Veljko Kovačević, Ivan Krajačić, Kosta Nadj, Jolisiye Popovski, Ivan Rukavina, Vojo Todorović are members of the Federal Council, many others have been elected deputies to the Federative Skupstina and the Skupstinas of the constituent socialist republics, appointed members of the Executive Council of the Federal Government and the constituent republics, ambassadors, trade-union leaders and account for a large proportion of the high-ranking officers of the Yugoslav People's Army.

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The civil war in Spain became an important event in the history of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia not only because it coincided with the struggle of the LCY and the entire international working-class movement against the fascist menace, for peace and national independence. Equally important was the fact that the lessons of this war helped towards the LCY's better preparedness for future trials, for stepping up operations in the war of liberation in its own country. Many future rank-and-file men and commanding officers of the People's Liberation Army and guerrilla units were steeled in the Spanish war and acquired valuable military and political experience.

Yugoslav veterans of the International Brigades, all Yugoslav Communists and the people never forget their great duty to the Spanish people, who were the first victims of the fascist aggression in Europe and the first to take up arms in defence of their freedom and independence, their revolutionary ideals, and who are now waging a selfless struggle against the fascist dictatorship.



## AFTERWORD

The national-revolutionary war in Spain, 1936 to 1939, is among the most important events of world history. The mid-thirties were a crucial stage in the struggle between the forces of peace and war, in the struggle of the proletariat against bourgeois reaction and its extreme form—fascism.

This was a time when the Italian fascist army had crushed Ethiopia, when nazi Germany had openly begun to rebuild its armed forces and in 1936 had marched into the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland. In Asia Japan had occupied Northeast China and attacked the city of Shanghai and was preparing to invade the central regions of China. Encouraged by the growing power of the fascist states, the extreme reactionaries in many countries were rapidly becoming active. In Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, Poland, and Austria the governments were turning fascist; the Croix du Feu organisation in France, the "Rexistes" in Belgium, the "Quislingers" in Norway were seeking to establish their power and impose fascism on these countries. But everywhere the forces of progress were rallying their ranks.

The working class of many countries, and particularly its advanced detachment—the Communists—realised what dangers and sufferings fascism would bring upon the people. Unfortunately, the international working-class movement at this crucial moment of history was split. Even when faced with the deadly danger of fascism and approaching world war, the leaders of the Second International refused to build a united working-class front.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in the summer of 1935 made a great contribution to the solidarity of the anti-fascist and anti-war forces. The Congress worked out a correct strategic orientation and called upon the working class to unite in action against fascism and the threat of a new imperialist war, to create a Popular Front combining the

workers and peasants and the bulk of the petty bourgeoisie of the towns and the intelligentsia.

These decisions roused a response in the hearts and minds of wide sections of the population in the countries of West and East. By 1936 the Popular Front had won the elections in Spain and in France. A trend towards unity of the democratic forces and real gains by the working people in the struggle against reaction were to be observed in the United States, Britain and other countries of the capitalist world.

In these years the Soviet Union made tremendous efforts to build a system of collective security in Europe and organise opposition to the aggressors. Thanks to the successful fulfilment of the first five-year plans and the strengthening of its industrial and defensive capacity the USSR was steadily strengthening its positions in the international field. Its treaties with France and Czechoslovakia on mutual aid, signed in May 1935, were a notable contribution to the organisation of a system of collective security.

The struggle between the forces of democracy and fascism was becoming ever more intense and in a number of cases took the form of armed conflict.

The scene of the first major clash was Spain.

About forty years separate us from the outbreak of the military-fascist revolt in Spain. The events that began on July 18, 1936 with the action of the reactionary generals and fascist and monarchist organisations at once became a focal point of world politics. Not only the fate of democracy in Spain was at stake; the solution to many problems on which the future of the whole European continent largely depended was in danger.

The progressive reforms in Spain, even those carried out within the framework of the democratic parliamentary system, evoked intervention from powerful external reactionary forces. The internal class conflict was converted into an international one.

The outcome of the battle that had begun on Spanish soil would decide what path that country was to take in future—the path of democratic development or that of a fascist regime. It was to have a considerable influence also on the general balance of forces on the international arena, either postponing or hastening a new world conflict.

The outbreak of the national-revolutionary war of the Spanish people in July 1936 had been preceded by several years of intense political class struggle within the country. The overthrow of the monarchy in 1931 had not led to the establishment of a strong republican system. The reactionary forces had not abandoned their attempts at restoration and were stirring up armed rebellions against the Republic and organising terrorist acts against its leaders. The bloc organised by the Right-wing parties, the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA), represent-



ed the interests of big capital, the landowners and the church, and was oriented towards Hitler Germany and Mussolini's Italy. The so-called radical party of Lerroux, which formed a government after victory at the elections at the end of 1933, was also virtually in the same camp as the reactionaries. The reactionary, anti-popular policy of this government caused the workers of the northern province of Asturias to take up arms in 1934 in defence of democracy. The uprising was harshly suppressed by the government but stimulated the unification of the progressive republican forces—Communists, Socialists and also the parties of the petty and middle bourgeoisie and the liberal intelligentsia.

In January 1936 the anti-fascist parties and organisations signed a pact on the creation of the Popular Front; one month later the Popular Front won the elections to the Cortes. This was the beginning of a new stage in Spanish history marked by the revolutionary inspiration of the masses and unity between the working class and other supporters of the Republic. But at the same time the reactionary fascist forces were consolidating. The big bourgeoisie, the numerous class of landowners, the officer class and a considerable number of priests of the Catholic Church, having lost hope of regaining political power by constitutional means, set out to prepare an armed coup.

The spearhead of the forces of political reaction was the fascist party, the Spanish Falange, organised on the nazi pattern and adopting nazi methods of provocation, terror and social demagoguery. In the Army and Navy, among the declassed elements in the cities and among the peasants of the most backward areas, the future insurgents carried on their work of corruption, recruited supporters and organised provocations against the Republic. At the same time they were forming ties with the capitals of the fascist states—Berlin and Rome.

Nazi aid to Spanish reaction was promised even before the outbreak of the mutiny. In February 1936 one of the ringleaders of the conspiracy, General Sanjurjo, flew from Portugal to Berlin. He met Goering and Rosenberg, informed the nazi bosses of the plans of the Spanish putschists and obtained a promise of support. The co-operation of fascist Italy had been guaranteed even before this. Under a pact concluded in 1934 in Rome between the representatives of Spanish reaction and Mussolini, the latter had undertaken to assist in the overthrow of the Republican Government with arms and money.

The revolt which began on July 18 at first took an unfavourable turn for the plotters. The armed actions of the military garrisons against the government were put down in the majority of key points. The insurgents' main standby—the Moroccan units and the Foreign Legion—were stationed in Africa, and Franco lacked the means to bring them over to the peninsula because the merchant

fleet and most of the seamen in the Navy refused to support the fascists. The revolt could have been nipped in the bud. The Chairman of the Second International, Louis de Brouckère, who was in Spain at the beginning of August 1936, wrote that his first conclusion had been that the Spanish Government and the Spanish people were capable of crushing the mutiny if there was no interference from anywhere else. At the same time, in August 1936, the nazi Admiral Raeder reported to Hitler that since the greater part of the air and naval forces were fighting on the Government's side, "it is not to be expected that the Franco Government can hold out for long without large-scale support from the outside".<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the conspiracy were also plunged in gloom. In a letter to Roosevelt the American ambassador in Spain, Claude G. Bowers, passed on the substance of his talks with Count Romanones, one of the pillars and ideologists of reaction. On the second day of the revolt Romanones expressed confidence that the insurgents would win within "four days or five days at the utmost". "Ten days later," writes Bowers, "I reminded him of what he had said and he made this very significant reply: 'We counted on the Navy and were disappointed, we thought the Basques would be with us and they are against us. But the most serious thing of all is we did not count on the general rising of the people.'" The fact is, Bowers adds on his own behalf, "people of all classes, under the nobility and moneyed aristocracy, are fighting with a superhuman courage never equalled in the history of Spain."<sup>2</sup> Even General Mola, commander of the armed forces of the insurgents in the northern zone, wrote to General Franco at the time that he believed the cause was lost.<sup>3</sup>

At this point the German Junkers were sent to the aid of the Francoists. Hitler ordered full support for the insurgents. Using the transport planes supplied by Germany, Franco was able within two weeks to transfer from Tetuan to Spain 18,000 Moroccan soldiers and officers with all their equipment. In Germany large air force units were prepared which a few months later, in November 1936, were sent to Spain as part of the Condor Legion. Thousands of officers and men of the regular German and Italian armies, armaments and equipment were sent to ports and airfields held by the insurgents. The nazis and Italian fascists launched a war of extermination against the Spanish people and

<sup>1</sup> *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945. Series D (1937-1945), Vol. III, Germany and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)*, Washington, 1950, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, Vol. III: September 1935-January 1937, Cambridge, Mass., 1963, pp. 396-97.

<sup>3</sup> *The War and Revolution in Spain 1936-1939*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1968, p. 185 (in Russian).



at the same time took over important strategic positions in the western half of the Mediterranean.

The following by no means complete figures give a notion of the scale of the fascist aggression in Spain. During the war Italy supplied the insurgents with 1,000 aircraft, 950 tanks and armoured cars, 1,930 artillery pieces, 8,759 heavy and light machine-guns, 1,426 mortars, nearly 250 thousand rifles, more than 7.5 million shells, 324 million rounds of ammunition, 16,720 tons of bombs, 1,000 tons of explosives and much other military equipment and materiel to a total value of 14,000 million lire. Huge quantities of materiel, guns, ammunition and equipment were also sent from Germany. In only two years of war—up to June 1938—Hitler supplied the insurgents with 650 aircraft, 200 tanks and 700 artillery pieces.

The units of the Italian army of invasion in Spain numbered 150,000-200,000 officers and men and the German Condor Legion was over 50,000 strong.<sup>1</sup>

If we add to the military equipment and manpower of the interventionists the more than 100,000 professional officers and trained regular soldiers of the units of the Spanish African Army, including the Moroccans and mercenaries of the Foreign Legion, we shall see how much courage, determination and self-sacrifice the Spanish people displayed in fighting for their freedom.

The refusal of the French Government to hand over to the Republic the arms that had long ago been ordered and paid for was a veritable stab in the back for Spanish democracy. To no avail were the meetings and demonstrations of protest by French workers and democrats demanding "Arms for Spain!" The government of Léon Blum, the leader of the Socialist Party, had virtually surrendered to the dictates of the French reactionary bourgeoisie.

The class interests of the bourgeoisie, its hatred of socialism, its fear of the establishment of democracy on the Pyrenean Peninsula, its desire to weaken the Popular Front in France and the democratic forces in Britain, the urge to use Nazi Germany as a spearhead against the USSR—all these factors prompted the ruling classes of these countries not merely to take no action against the counter-revolutionary intervention of the fascist states in Spain but even to encourage it. The reactionary frame of mind of the short-sighted political leaders of the West was built up by German propaganda with its screams about the "arm of the Kremlin", the threat of the "bolshévisation of Spain", etc. While ships with arms and troops disguised in civilian clothes were being dispatched under cover of night from German ports to Spain, Goebbels could

<sup>1</sup> Michal Bron, Eugeniusz Kozłowski, Maciej Techniczek, *Wojna Hiszpańska 1936-1939*, Warsaw, 1964, p. 486; *The Communist International*, No. 7, 1938, p. 57.

be heard on the radio declaring: "We are well aware that the Bolsheviks need Spain for an attack on France."

The Anglo-French idea of non-intervention in Spanish affairs arose in the first days of the fascist mutiny. It was officially proposed by Léon Blum to all governments with the aim of disguising the policy of encouraging fascist aggression in Spain and making this policy acceptable to the broad public. A committee representing 27 European countries was set up in London to see that this agreement was observed. But despite the intentions of the initiators of "non-intervention" and thanks to the efforts of Soviet diplomacy, the platform of the London committee was used to inform international public opinion concerning the facts of the criminal armed intervention in Spain by the fascist states of Germany, Italy and Portugal, and to make known the principled stand of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Government openly declared in the Non-Intervention Committee, the League of Nations and in other quarters that, in accordance with the accepted standards of international law, help to a legal government, including the sale of arms, could not be regarded as intervention, and that the Soviet Government did not consider itself bound by the agreement on non-intervention to any greater extent than the other signatories who were continuing to supply the insurgents with arms.<sup>1</sup>

In September a massive flow of various kinds of material aid—the result of a nation-wide campaign of solidarity launched by the Soviet public—began to flow into Spain. In the second half of October Spain began to receive from the USSR the first transports carrying purchases of military materials—aircraft, tanks, infantry and artillery weapons, and ammunition.

In the hands of the defenders of the Republic these arms made it possible to halt the advance of the insurgents and interventionists on Madrid. The very character of the war changed and the detachments and columns of the People's Militia were reorganised on a regular basis.

The creation of the Republican People's Army in the course of the war was one of the major achievements of the Spanish people. The Republican Army, led by gifted commanders from the people, won splendid victories in the battles for Madrid, on the Aragon Front, on the River Ebro and in other engagements. But the tacitly hostile position of France, Britain and the United States, which were blockading the Republic, in effect encouraged the fascist piracy in the Mediterranean with the result that the lines of communication between Spain and the Soviet Union were broken and the insurgents and interventionists were afforded a growing advantage in military equipment. Without hindrance they were

<sup>1</sup> *Izvestia*, October 8, 24, 30 and December 11, 1936.



able to import unlimited amounts of arms and troops to Spanish territory occupied by the insurgents. It was this inequality that ultimately determined the unfavourable outcome of the war for the Republic.

The Spanish people's national-revolutionary war against the combined forces of fascism roused a mass movement of solidarity in all parts of the world. As a genuine people's movement it had a great wealth and variety of forms and attracted men and women of various social status, profession, and political and religious beliefs. The friends of the Spanish people set themselves two basic aims: the first was to raise the blockade of the Spanish Republic, conducted under cover of the policy of "non-intervention" and restore the legitimate rights of the Spanish Government to obtain arms for the defence of the democratic system; the second was all-round assistance for the population of the Spanish Republic, women and children suffering under the blockade and the brutal bombing of peaceful towns and villages by German and Italian aircraft.

The first aim was never achieved because the "democratic" governments of France, Britain and the United States refused to consider the clearly expressed will of the masses of the people of these countries. Public pressure did, however, achieve some results. For instance, it may be considered responsible for the periodic relaxations of the harsh restrictions imposed at the Franco-Spanish frontier, which at times made possible the transit of some freight in aid of the Republic, including military equipment from the Soviet Union.

The campaign of material assistance was undoubtedly successful. According to the report of the International Committee for Co-ordination of Aid to Republican Spain, 18 countries alone supplied food and other materials to the value of 800 million francs. Millions of people all over the world contributed to this noble cause.

Valuable though the material results were, the chief and historically significant outcome of the solidarity movement was that it marked an important stage in the development of international progressive thought, broadened and sharpened the peoples' understanding of the danger of fascism, and hastened the transition from pacifist and passive forms of protest to active and effective forms.

"The destructive flood of international fascism must be halted. A decisive blow must be struck against this inhuman rampage of obscurantism, racial prejudice, desire for plunder and glorification of war. . . . Civilisation must be saved from the onrush of barbarity," Rabindranath Tagore declared in an appeal to world opinion.<sup>1</sup> Romain Rolland, another influential figure among pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Rundschau über Politik, Wissenschaft und Arbeiterbewegung*, March 24, 1937, Basle, No. 13, p. 519.

gressive intellectuals, wrote in an appeal to the Congress of the French General Confederation of Labour: "Our watchword is Peace and Liberty. But Peace is by no means a cowardly selfishness which avoids the sacred duties of the people, its national dignity, its honouring of promises, its resistance to the oppressor. . . . We must add to our slogans yet another . . . this slogan is Courage. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The arrogant challenge that fascism had hurled at democracy, the sovereignty of the peoples, and the working people's social gains awakened a readiness to meet fascist violence with force. The answer of many hundreds of workers and democratic anti-fascists to the Italo-German aggression in Spain was a desire to take a personal part, gun in hand, in barring the road to fascism.

This impulse did not come all of a sudden. It had been prepared by the process of growth of the fighting spirit of the working people, particularly the whole working class, in the early part of the thirties. The Asturias and Vienna uprisings in 1934, the action taken by the Paris workers to prevent an attempted fascist coup in February 1934, the action of the worker anti-fascists in 1936, who drove the Mosley gangs from the streets of London, and many other facts were symptomatic of this process.

In August 1936, 300,000 Americans wishing to volunteer for the army of the Spanish Republic applied to the Spanish Embassy in Washington. Similar spontaneous responses took place in Canada, Poland and other countries. But it speedily emerged that the sympathies of the governments of the bourgeois states, even the most democratic, were by no means on the side of the Spanish Republic. All kinds of legal and administrative measures were taken by these governments to prevent the departure of volunteers for Republican Spain.

These prohibitions only had the result of a kind of natural selection from among the volunteers of the most resolute, courageous and convinced fighters. The Communist parties of all countries headed the movement and gave it their best cadres. Only the Communists, the Communist International as a whole, were capable of shouldering such a task.

The British Communist leader Harry Pollitt in a book dedicated to the Communist writer Ralph Fox, who was killed in action against the fascists at Córdoba, wrote: "Friends of Spain who are not members of the Communist Party will pardon me if I refer with pride to the achievements that have been carried out by all sections of the Communist International in support of the Spanish Government. Without the existence of this International of steeled and disciplined revolutionary fighters, the material and moral

<sup>1</sup> *L'Humanité*, November 12, 1968, p. 2.



forms of aid sent to Spain would have brought no accomplishment."<sup>1</sup>

The International Brigades, made up of anti-fascist volunteers of different political colourings, have gone down in history as the fullest expression of international solidarity and assistance to the Spanish people provided by the world anti-fascist front. The work of selecting volunteers and getting them abroad and into Spain fell almost entirely to the Communist parties of various countries and the Communist International as a whole.

What were the International Brigades, these troops of a kind that history had never seen before, who left such profound impression on the consciousness of their contemporaries, on politics, literature and art, who played an important role in the struggle of the Armed Forces of the Republic against the insurgents and interventionists, who provided fighters in the Resistance movement in a number of countries during the Second World War, and who became a symbol of devotion to the cause of democracy and freedom of the peoples, self-sacrifice and service to the finest ideals of humanity?

The modern reader needs at least a brief introduction to the facts concerning the organisation, composition and fighting record of the International Brigades, particularly as the attempts of bourgeois propaganda, either openly pro-fascist or masked as scientific objectivity, to give a distorted picture of the "freedom volunteers" and their historic role have not ceased even today.

The formation of International Brigades was from the outset part of the government plan to organise a new regular Republican Army. This plan provided for the transformation of the columns of the People's Militia on the Madrid Front into brigades and at the same time the building up in the rear of fifteen reserve brigades (Nos 11 to 25 inclusive) to regular army strength. This work was handled by a government commission, the "Junta", headed by Martínez Barrio, Chairman of the Cortes, and his staff in the town of Albacete. It was in this town that the base for the international formations was set up on October 20 on orders of the War Minister.

Martínez Barrio allotted to the International Brigades the first five numbers from the fifteen (from 11 to 15) and he was not mistaken: they were, in fact, the first to go into action. The 11th and 12th brigades took up positions on the front line at the beginning of November, and the 13th and 14th, at the end of December, while the ten Spanish brigades completed formation and went into action in January-February 1937 along with the 15th International Brigade.

These five brigades constituted the core of the international force. Subsequently the organisational activity of the base

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Fox, *A Writer in Arms*, New York, 1937, p. 4.

amounted to reception and training of new volunteers, formation into active units for the front, and dispatch to the front of men returning from hospitals.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1937, on the Central Front a new International Brigade, named after Dabrowski, was formed out of the 12th Brigade, but almost at the same time the 13th Brigade had to be disbanded after heavy losses in the Brunete operation and its number was passed on to the new brigade instead of the temporary number 150. The sixth brigade with the number 129 was born in February 1938, also at the front—in Estremadura—and comprised a group of reserve battalions that had previously been attached to the 45th Division.

In addition, another three international battalions were formed, as part of the 86th Spanish Brigade and attached to the 35th and 45th divisions (these divisions were not officially known as international, but they usually comprised International Brigades).

The base also built up six separate anti-tank artillery batteries, two anti-aircraft batteries and six battalions (groups) of field artillery. Volunteer airmen and tank crews were sent to Republican air force and tank units.

The basic units of the International Brigades, as throughout the Spanish Army, were the battalions, which were given an official number and an unofficial but traditionally recognised name in honour of historic figures or events, revolutionary leaders and fighters against fascism and also comrades who had fallen in the fighting in Spain.<sup>2</sup> Often these names with their national revolutionary or democratic traditions became in the home countries of the volunteers—in the United States, Canada, Poland, etc.—a kind of password for friends of Republican Spain and spurred the campaign of aid for the Republic and its defenders—the Lincoln, Dabrowski and Garibaldi men, and so on. In many cases the name-giving was a tribute to solidarity with the anti-fascist struggle of other peoples, a tribute of respect to the leaders of the working class.

It should be stressed that this or that name should not be taken as denoting the nationality of all the members of the unit or even

<sup>1</sup> According to data provided by the commander of the base General Gomez, between November 1936 and April 1938, 52,000 volunteers passed through the base on the way to the front, including 18,714 in the period up to March 1937, 6,017 from April to July, 7,781 from August to November 15, 19,472 from November 16 to April 1938. These figures include wounded who made the return journey through the base (*From the History of International Proletarian Solidarity*, Documents and Materials, Vol. 6, Moscow, 1962, pp. 72-73, in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> Altogether 30 battalions were formed at the Albacete base, including 9 French battalions. As a result of heavy casualties certain battalions were disbanded or merged to form new units. There were 22 battalions in Six International Brigades by the end of the war (Michał Bron., *Wojna Hiszpańska*, pp. 484-85).



the majority. Although the military command and political workers, having in mind administrative matters, training and communication on the fields of battle, tried to build up units with a common language, they were not always able to achieve this. There was not a single brigade comprising only one nationality, and hardly a single battalion. All the more remarkable was the feeling of unity that characterised the volunteer brigades. The spirit of proletarian internationalism that had brought together under the banner of the Republican Army men and women from all over the planet stood the test of the arduous, bloody fighting in Spain.

The gradual but steady process of Spanish assimilation of the International Brigades, and also of the air and tank units, took place in an atmosphere of fraternal friendship and unity between the Spanish and volunteer personnel. By July 1938 two-thirds of the brigades consisted of Spanish officers and men and in the brilliant operation to force the River Ebro and to defend the captured bridgehead from July to September 1938 they showed a great fighting capacity and mass heroism.

This book is not intended to give a systematic account of the national-revolutionary war of the Spanish people and the participation of the international volunteers. It was felt, however, that some record of the main stages in the military operations of the International Brigades should be provided as a background to the war episodes referred to by contributors. The main operations in which the International Brigades took part and the battles they fought are accordingly noted in chronological order in the table below.

This list does not include the movement of brigades from one front to another, the periods of positional warfare and minor operations of local significance. It does show, however, that not a single major operation of the Republican forces—offensive or defensive—was carried out without the participation of the international volunteers. This very fact, combined with the growing fighting capacity of the best units of the Republican Army, indicates how highly the main command of the Republic valued the fighting qualities of the volunteers. Juan Modesta, an outstanding general of the Republican Army, wrote: "The fighting operations of the 35th Division, of which at various times all the International Brigades formed a part, made me proud of them and I am proud of them to this day."<sup>1</sup> It is a remarkable fact that despite the significant increase in the strength of the government army (in 1938, 776 battalions), the International Brigades—an average of 25 battalions—retained their role as shock units to the end.

The exploits of the international units were episodes in the operations of the large formations of the Republican Army. But

<sup>1</sup> Juan Modesta, *Soy de Quinto Regimiento*, Paris, 1969, p. 157.

| Battles and operations | Date                    | Brigades       | Battles and Operations                | Date            | Brigades           |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Defence of Madrid      | Nov. 1936-<br>Jan. 1937 | 11, 12, 14     | Teruel                                | Jan.-Feb. 1938  | 11, 15             |
| Mirabueno (Sigüenza)   | Jan. 1937               | 12             | Segura de los Baños                   | Feb. 1938       | 11, 15             |
| Teruel                 | Dec. 1936-<br>Jan. 1937 | 12<br>13       | Zalamea                               | Feb. 1938       | 12, 13, 129        |
| Lopera                 | Dec. 1936               | 14             | Defensive operations at Eastern Front |                 |                    |
| Motril                 | Feb. 1937               | 13             |                                       |                 |                    |
| Pitres                 | Feb. 1937               | 13             |                                       |                 |                    |
| Jarama                 | Feb. 1937               | 11, 12, 14, 15 | Belchite-Lécera                       | March 1938      | 15, 13             |
| Guadalajara            | March 1937              | 11, 12         | Vinaceite                             | March 1938      | 11                 |
| Pozoblanco             | Apr. 1937               | 13             | Hijar                                 | March 1938      | 13, 15             |
| Pingarrón              | Apr. 1937               | 12             | Caspe                                 | March 1938      | 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 |
| Garabitas              | May 1937                | 12             | Maella                                | March 1938      | 129                |
| Ulande                 | May 1937                | 11             | Monroyo                               | March 1938      | 129                |
| Balsain (Segovia)      | May-June 1937           | 14             | Batea                                 | March 1938      | 11, 15             |
| Huesca                 | June 1937               | 12             | Gandesa                               | March-Apr. 1938 | 11, 15             |
| Brunete                | July 1937               | 11, 12, 13, 15 | Lérida                                | March-Apr. 1938 | 13                 |
| Zaragoza               |                         |                | Mora la Nueva                         | Apr.-May 1938   | 11, 13, 15         |
| Quinto                 | Aug. 1937               | 11, 15         | Aliaga                                | March-Apr. 1938 | 129                |
| Villamayor del Gallego | Aug. 1937               | 12, 13         | Castellón                             | July 1938       | 129                |
| Belchite               | Sept. 1937              | 15             | Ebro Operation                        |                 |                    |
| Mediana                | Aug.-Sept. 1937         | 11             |                                       |                 |                    |
| Grañen                 | Sept.-Dec. 1937         | 11, 15         | Amposta                               | July 1938       | 14                 |
| Fuentes del Ebro       | Oct. 1937               | 15             | Ascó-Flix                             | July 1938       | 11, 13, 15         |
| Cuesta de la Reina     | Oct. 1937               | 14             | Corbera                               | July 1938       | 11, 13, 15         |
|                        |                         |                | Sierra Pandols                        | Aug.-Sept. 1938 | 11, 13, 15         |
|                        |                         |                | Sierra Caballs                        | Aug.-Sept. 1938 | 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 |
|                        |                         |                | Vértice de Gaeta                      | Aug.-Oct. 1938  | 129                |
|                        |                         |                | Manzanera (Levante)                   | 1938            |                    |



without these episodes the record of the struggle of the Spanish people against fascist aggression would be incomplete. They are also part of the struggle of the forces of democracy and socialism for victory over fascist Germany and Italy during the Second World War.

The losses suffered by the international volunteers—not less than 20,000 killed, mortally wounded, missing and disabled—were the first losses in the European peoples' resistance to fascism. At the same time this was yet another eloquent testimony to the fighting activity of the International Brigades.

Historical records give various estimates of the total number of international volunteers in the Spanish Republican Army. The most frequently named figure is 35,000,<sup>1</sup> although a thoughtful and competent military leader like General Walter (Karol Swierczewski), commander of the 35th Division of the Republican Army, considers 42,000 as a quite probable figure.<sup>2</sup> He attributes the difficulties in this question to the poor recording of personnel at the Albacete base and in the International Brigades themselves.

According to press reports, the Military Control Commission of the League of Nations, which arrived in October 1938 to supervise the withdrawal of the international volunteers, established after a series of checks that there had been altogether 32,109 internationalists in Spain, of which only 12,144 remained in October.

There can be no doubt that the total figure of volunteers requires further verification. Besides Swierczewski's remarks about the lack of records at the International Brigades' base, a number of other factors must be taken into account. Not all the volunteers from abroad registered at the base, particularly those who arrived from the Latin American countries and, thanks to their common language, joined up immediately with the Spanish units of the militia and the regular army. The Soviet volunteers—airmen, tank crews and other specialists assigned to the general Spanish military units—are not listed in the records either.

There were also different approaches to the recording of nationality. Emigrés—Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Italians and others who arrived in Spain from Argentina, the USA, Canada and Belgium—were sometimes registered according to their national origin and at others, according to the countries from which they had come and where they had left families behind them. This is one reason why the number of volunteers indicated in some of the articles of the present book differs from the data of the Albacete base for the International Brigades referred to by Swierczew-

<sup>1</sup> K. L. Maidanik, *The Spanish Proletariat in the National-Revolutionary War*, p. 205; M. Azcarate and J. Sandoval, *986 días de lucha*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, p. 72; José García, *Twentieth-Century Spain*, Moscow, 1967, p. 228 (in Russian).

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Archives*, No. 2, 1962, p. 172.

ski.<sup>1</sup> It is quite likely that the total figure, when thoroughly checked in every country, will have to be increased by four or five thousand. At all events the strength of international volunteers, which never exceeded 12 to 15 thousand in any period, was several times less than that of the German and Italian armies of intervention, which was never less than 100 to 120 thousand at one time.

The true character of the belligerents in Spain and the role of foreign forces in the struggle came out in the reaction of each side to the proposal of the London Committee on Non-Intervention for the withdrawal from Spain of foreign volunteers. The Republican Government, while stressing the national significance of the struggle against the fascist interventionists and insurgents, agreed to withdraw immediately the international volunteers from the fronts and implemented this decision immediately between the 23rd and 25th of September, 1938. In complete contrast, General Franco categorically refused to accept the plan for the withdrawal of the Italo-German troops; he was not prepared to risk facing the Spanish people alone, without the support of the interventionists.

The battle of the Ebro, the last to be fought by the volunteers on Spanish soil, ended on November 15. As they had done two years before, during the defence of Madrid, the defenders of the Republic demonstrated self-sacrifice, determination and devotion to the ideal of freedom and Motherland. When they quitted Spanish soil and said farewell to their Spanish brothers-in-arms, the volunteers were clearly aware that there lay ahead of them a continuation of the fight against fascism that had begun in Spain. In two years the world had moved to the brink of war. The efforts of the fascist Rome-Berlin-Tokio "axis" were dragging more and more countries into a new imperialist war: after Ethiopia—Spain, then China, for the conquest of which Japan had put more than a million men under arms. In the autumn of 1938 Japan launched an armed attack on the territory of the USSR at Lake Khasan, but was repulsed. Austria and Czechoslovakia fell victim to fascist aggression in Europe.

In every case of aggression the "axis" countries flew the flag of anti-communism and ensured themselves the invariable connivance of the "democratic" states of France, Britain and the U.S.A.

At the outset of the mass intervention in Spain, in October 1936, Hitler stated in a conversation with Ciano: "We must go over to the attack. And the tactical field on which we must execute the manoeuvre is that of anti-Bolshevism. In fact, many countries which are suspicious of Italo-German friendship for fear of Pan-

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Archives*, pp. 172-73; K. Swierczewski (Walter), *W bojach o wolność Hiszpanii*, 1966, p. 217.



Germanism or Italian imperialism and would join the opposing camp, will be brought to group themselves with us if they see in Italo-German unity the barrier against the Bolshevik menace at home and abroad."<sup>1</sup>

The Munich pact between Britain and France on one side and Germany and Italy on the other on the division of Czechoslovakia was the biggest but not the last bait that was thrown to Nazi Germany in the hope of turning her against the USSR. The next victim was Spain.

The blockade at sea and on the Franco-Spanish frontier was strangling the Republic. With its stores empty of ammunition after the battle on the River Ebro and with unreplenished losses of rifles, machine-guns, artillery, tanks and aircraft, the Republican Army faced the December 1938 offensive on Catalonia by 400,000 fascist troops and was broken in an unequal struggle. The fall of Catalonia was the prologue to the defeat of the Spanish people in March 1939. In the final days of the Catalonian tragedy, in an attempt to save hundreds of thousands of refugees—women, children and old men fleeing from the fascist plague to the French frontier—the internationalists who were still in Spain awaiting evacuation once again took up arms to check the forward enemy units in rearguard actions.

The tragedy of Catalonia raised a new wave of solidarity with Spain and protests against the fascist warmongers. The Soviet Government did everything it could to effect transit of the arms ordered by the Spanish Government through France to Catalonia, but when the French Government eventually agreed to allow the arms across the frontier it was too late.

Persistent demands to end the policy of encouraging aggression came from the peoples of Britain, France and the United States. Unfortunately, however, the forces of democracy were unable (largely because of the lack of unity between the parties and organisations of the working class) to force their governments to carry out the will of the peoples. Europe and the whole world were soon to endure the disasters of the Second World War.

The former international volunteers, many of them with wounds unhealed from the battlefields of Spain, again threw themselves into the struggle. From their ranks came many gifted generals and other military leaders of the Soviet Armed Forces and the national-liberation armies of several countries of Europe. Many members of the International Brigades became selfless fighters in the European Resistance during the Second World War, fearless underground fighters, commanders and soldiers of the guerrilla detachments, intelligence agents and couriers.

The Soviet Union and its armed forces played the decisive role

in the defeat of the fascist powers. The battles against fascism, which had begun in Madrid, reached their culmination in the great struggle of the Soviet armies for Berlin and the unconditional surrender of Hitler Germany.

In the decades that have passed since the national-revolutionary war in Spain the political face of the world has changed. The world socialist system of states has grown up and acquired solid shape; dozens of new independent developing countries have been built on the ruins of the colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Imperialism has lost its monopoly power over the fate of nations, the forces of peace and progress have increased and their influence on the course of events has grown tremendously. But many of the problems that worried people in the thirties retain their vital importance today.

Those of the older generation look back over the years and realise the meaning of their experience in the thirties; the young people turn to them in their search for models on which to base their own actions. Hence the growing interest in recent years in the "stormy thirties", in the events of the Spanish war, the international movement of solidarity with the Spanish people, and the splendid achievement of the vanguard of that solidarity—the volunteers of the International Brigades.

The veterans of the International Brigades of twenty-one countries who wrote this book—a unique account of events by those who participated in them—hope that it will make good reading for both the older and younger generations, for all those who wish to draw from the experience of the past lessons that will be of use in work and struggle for a better future.

<sup>1</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, London, 1948, p. 57.



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